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Viewpoint and Vision in George Eliot: The Novelist and Her Major Fiction

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VIEWPOINT AND VISION IN GEORGE ELIOT:
THE NOVELIST
AND
HER MAJOR FICTION

by
Patricia Ward Svec

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate
School of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial
Fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

November

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to dedicate this work to the memory of my father, Carl D. Ward, who was a master at blending the practical with the theoretical, a graduate Civil Engineer who read the complete works of Shakespeare for enjoyment.

* * * * *

A sincere expression of gratitude is certainly due the following individuals, without whom this task could not have been accomplished:

- Father Gene D. Phillips, S.J., who has shared my thoughts about George Eliot during the past several years and whose expertise and encouragement have been of such great value to me;
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- Those who are still my friends, despite my withdrawal from social contact during the past few years.

VITA

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A musician and artist in her own right, Mrs. Svec has been involved in several organizations to promote the arts among young people. She has served as president of the Prospect Heights Instrumental League.

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Chapter I

Building a Philosophy

Old men ought to be explorers
Here and there does not matter
We must be still and still moving
Into another intensity
For a further union, a deeper communion
Through the dark cold and the empty desolation,
The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters
Of the petrel and the porpoise. In my end is my
beginning.

T. S. Eliot, "East Coker"

Any study of George Eliot, either as person or as novelist, should begin with a recognition of her prima facie eclecticism and a conscious refusal to identify her with any single philosophic, religious, or literary movement. Throughout her adult life, Eliot remained unreservedly open to every intellectual and ethical stimulus available to her not only through the ordinary channels of study and experience but also through her judicious exercise of imagination and insight. Her sensitivity to both the past and the present and her intuitive awareness of the future gave Eliot a perspective of life which was open to all times, all men, and all ideas.

Because of the universal presence of contradiction and opposition among the various philosophies of mankind,

openness to all presupposes selection of some and rejection of others. In the case of Eliot, selectivity was done on as objective a basis as possible. In other words, for her, today's choices--made in the light of NOW--were not necessarily tomorrow's guiding principles--made in the light of THEN. Eliot's beliefs were continually refined and altered as new insights came forward to replace old ones. Like Georg Hegel, she did not see any particular truth as a final solution to the mystery of man's existence; rather she used it as a step toward asking the next question. Because she was an intellectual with great powers of discernment, Eliot was able to absorb, sort, and accept or reject portions of various systems of belief and to incorporate into her own life whatever specific aspects of those systems she considered compatible with her personal dedication to humanity, sympathy, freedom, altruism, involvement, and responsibility.¹ Her continued free choice of the best of what she knew and her openness to all positive stimuli kept her from becoming bogged down in either the past or the present and gave both her life and her fiction a forward thrust which is essentially more modern than it is either Romantic or Victorian.

Although both the life and the fiction of George Eliot contain several elements which identify them with either the Romantic or the Victorian era--that is, elements traditional to mid-nineteenth century England--they also

represent radical thinking and the kind of concern for the inner workings of man's mind which is generally identified with twentieth century novels and novelists. Felicia Bonaparte believes that Eliot "speaks as immediately to the modern consciousness as the most current writer" (vii). One of the reasons for this is what D. H. Lawrence calls Eliot's "putting all the action inside" (Gregor 96), that is, exposing the interior struggles of characters as they make decisions, deal with their guilt, and examine their motives before the eyes of the reader. Gregor believes that it is because of this kind of revelation of the inner workings of the characters' minds that Eliot forces her readers to shift their role "from [one of] contemplation to [one of] participation" (95).

Another reason for this role change on the part of the reader is Eliot's refusal to answer questions in her novels. She presents confusion about values as a dilemma and offers no answers for man's great puzzle about the human condition. When a reader is presented with questions rather than answers, he is left no choice but to participate in the action by making judgments or by asking questions of his own. The entire collection of Eliot's novels was considered by Henry James to be "an end and a beginning" (Gregor 96), a pivot into modern fiction. Bonaparte further suggests that, in addition to all of this, we have "not yet explored the most thoroughly

contemporary aspect of Eliot's novels, namely the existential" (viii). Among other things, that exploration will be a substantial part of this study.

A significant factor in George Eliot's sense of the future is her view of herself as a free agent for whom freedom corresponds with a serious responsibility toward and concern for all humanity. Her writing was a power which made it possible for her to communicate with many of her fellows by presenting them with characters, situations, and judgments which would allow them insights into man's existence and exposure to that which is basically hidden from all men--the inner thoughts and struggles of other people. Like Eliot herself, the characters in her novels function as free agents who, although many of them suffer greatly and even die, choose their lot and abide by their own choices. Dinah Morris, Dorothea Brooke, Maggie Tulliver, Silas Marner, and even Hetty Sorrel and Daniel Deronda, along with many other important Eliot characters, act as free individuals and, because of this, are responsible for doing or not doing whatever action is possible for them. As a necessary result of this free agency, both George Eliot and her fictional characters become what they make of themselves. There are no intervening factors; Determinism, in the Naturalistic sense, and Fate, in the Sophoclean tradition, play little or no part. Both Eliot's life and work are dominated by

this aspect of Existentialism, by this profile of an individual freely taking the raw material of his existence and creating from it his own essence through a succession of free choices.

Of course, the fully-developed George Eliot came into being only gradually. She spent almost forty years gathering the data about humanity, culture, and thought of which we see the evidence in her early fiction; then, throughout her professional life, she invested another several years in continuing to grow and mature into the George Eliot who could eventually produce Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda. From her early childhood, she used her vast intellectual power to absorb, understand, accept, deny, and question truth as it was presented to her. Because a sense of the world which surrounded young Marian Evans is essential to understanding both George Eliot and her fiction, a brief examination of that world would seem both relevant and helpful.

* * * * *

The nineteenth century was a time of enormous innovation. Probably the greatest challenge of the time was adjustment to rapid changes. Political upheaval, religious unrest, scientific experimentation, and philosophical proposals and counterproposals left the world citizen both the responsibility of choosing from countless

alternatives and the instability of walking on shifting "sacred ground."

Unlike much of Europe, England had already experienced its revolution, the backlash of which plummeted her into a state of political conservatism. Despite this condition of general passivity, the egalitarian attitudes, which were cropping up all over Europe from 1789 forward, did not go unfelt in the geographically separated British Isles. Man's individuality, his supremacy over himself, his need to seek a level of education and productivity commensurate with his personal talents rather than with his circumstances of parentage, sex, class, and economic level found its support and outlet in several of the new "-isms" which began and/or flourished between 1800 and 1900--not the least important of which is Romanticism.

Despite all of its varied and even conflicting definitions and descriptions, Romanticism basically championed the ideals of belief in the potential of humankind, the magnitude of man's spirit, the creative power of the imagination, the importance of the individual, and man's oneness both with his brothers and with the beauties of nature. Despite its affiliation with these lofty principles, Romanticism is often treated pejoratively and relegated to being synonymous only with its less noble qualities of sentimentality, fantasy, and melodrama. This position, which ignores many of the strong and

enduring attributes of Romanticism, is unfortunate because it somehow denigrates names like Wordsworth, Keats, Beethoven, Wagner, Delacroix, and Constable. Actually, innovation and creativity are born of this kind of philosophical climate.

Romantics were individuals with dreams -- visions, if you will; and because of them, philosophy, theology, art, music, science, technology, and literature broke from their established traditions and began charting new paths. Eliot's love for William Wordsworth and Sir Walter Scott aligned her with these men of vision and gave her formative years contact with minds which had broken from the existing tradition and established their own norms. It seems fair to say that Romanticism freed the minds of intellectuals and rendered them uninhibited and open to exploration. George Eliot's lifetime of exposure to the influence of these innovators could well have been a significant factor in laying the foundation from which her readiness to break with tradition and to build her own philosophy grew. Romanticism taught man to think with his imagination. Eliot's fiction is a testimony to her belief in the importance of this concept.

As the literature of the century progressed, the Romantics' idealistic concern with man's actualizing his true potential and creating a perfect and harmonious world receded as the more dominant Victorian preoccupation with

promoting social reform, Puritan ideals, moralistic rigidity, and industrial change rose in importance. Calvin Bedient describes the viewpoint of Victorian authors as singularly restrictive:

Their horizons were, precisely, "Victorian"; they were not in a position to look beyond. Restive and revisionary as some of the high Victorians were, none of them chose not to be Victorian. None walked out of the present into the future, or back into the Romantic past. And the reason for this was that, with the exception of John Stuart Mill, none could bring himself to believe that he had a choice. (5)

Now Mr. Bedient includes George Eliot in his consideration of Victorian writers, and his evaluation of them as inhibited and limited overlooks Eliot's multifaceted vision and intellectual openness. Indeed, much of her writing and some of the writing of her contemporaries exemplify not only a backward look at the idealism of the Romantics but a forward look at the concerns of modern writers who are preoccupied, as she was, with the inner workings of the mind, man's interdependence on and responsibility for his fellow man, and the nature of morality and free choice.

Expressing a viewpoint opposite to the subsequent stand of Bedient, G. K. Chesterton, a conservative critic, extols George Eliot in particular and the Victorians in general as "mainly modern" (38). Indeed, many Victorians reached a level of creativity which can only be achieved by an author who does, in fact, "look beyond" and who does believe that he has a "choice." Although Chesterton's

early twentieth-century concept of "modern" differs from ours, his comments seem relevant. He attributes the growth of modern readers' interest in the Victorian novel to an increased concern on the part of some later authors of the period for "the things in which men differ" (42) rather than the things which they have in common. This very look at differences emphasizes individuality and forces openness to variation and to the right to be oneself. Although attention to individual differences is a characteristic which Chesterton labels "Victorian," emphasis on each person as unique is a value which the Victorians learned from their Romantic predecessors.

Another ideal often associated with the mid-to-late nineteenth century in England is the "Victorian work ethic." Although explanations of this "work ethic" usually emphasize its duty-bound, restrictive, and even Deterministic nature, George Eliot viewed it as neither de facto robbing an individual of his freedom nor necessarily rendering him either unimaginative or sterile. Actually, Eliot's personal drive to write successfully and effectively and her fictional characters' close attention to earning an honest wage, performing appointed tasks exactly, and presenting a finished product in which they could take pride indicate that her definition of the Victorian "work ethic" grew out of her belief in man's freedom to develop himself into a productive and successful

human being. Alan Mintz describes various Victorian views of work:

The enthusiasm for work is a virtual touchstone of Victorian sensibility. As reason had been to the Enlightenment, work was to the Victorians: an overarching term that sanctioned a multitude of diverse, often antagonistic positions. For some, working was the chief way of doing God's will in the world; and for others, work became a "gospel" in its own right, replacing Christianity's claims on man. For some, work was a selfless submission to one's duty that helped to further the progress of mankind; and for others work meant the development of one's natural talents and the assertion of individual genius. (1-2)

He points out that these last two interpretations describe George Eliot's convictions as they are reflected both in her life and in her fiction. Eliot was indeed a Victorian, but she was a Victorian on her own terms. Information concerning how she broke out of the tradition in which she grew up and how she became a free-thinker in a restricted Victorian milieu is only available a posteriori in her reflective writings about those forty years. Because Eliot was so analytical, even these highly subjective and informal writings were sufficiently consistent and clear to contribute greatly toward answering those two important questions.

* * * * *

It is coincidental that Marian Evans, one of the outstanding representatives of the Victorian era, and Victoria Alexandrina, after whom the period is named, were born in the same year, 1819. Miss Evans's early childhood

was spent in her beloved Warwickshire with her family. Of all of her siblings, her brother Isaac, three years her senior, was her favorite. Even until her death in 1880, her special fondness for Isaac prevailed. As a child, Marian was an avid reader. Her special books, which had a great influence on her young and active mind, were Pilgrim's Progress, The Vicar of Wakefield, Aesop's Fables, Defoe's History of the Devil, and Joe Miller's Jest Book. "Sir Walter Scott first introduced her to the writing of fiction" (Haight, Biography 7) when she was allowed to read a borrowed copy of Waverley in 1827.

As her schooling progressed, Marian continued to expand her intellectual and imaginative powers by reading Pascal's Pensées, Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Young, Byron (Haight, Biography 12-13), Thomas à Kempis's Imitation of Christ (Haight, Biography 18) and the poetry of Wordsworth. The deep impression which most of these authors and works made on Marian Evans lasted all of her life. Impulses of literature, religion, education, companionship, suffering, loss, insecurity, and doubt passed through the consciousness of the growing child and the impressionable adolescent until the maturing woman emerged. It was as if Marian's entire youth had been spent acquiring data from which George Eliot would come forth, gathering information out of which a life philosophy would be born and a raison d'être clearly defined. One of the great sorrows of her

youth was the loss of her mother. Shortly after Mrs. Evans's death in 1836, Marian moved to Coventry with her father where she met Charles Bray, the first of many "radical" influences in her life.²

Although her father and many of her contemporaries blamed her association with the Brays for her break with Christianity, the truth is that for many years prior to the move to Coventry, Marian had "suffered from constant inner conflict, for she was simultaneously pulled in opposite directions."³ The restrictions and teachings of her religious creed seemed to require that she live for God alone and practice severe asceticism when, on the other hand, her sensual nature sought worldly enjoyment and recognition (Paris 5-6). In an essay entitled "St. Theresa, St. Dorothea, and Miss Brooke in Middlemarch," Hilary Fraser deals with this "dialectic between self-sacrifice and sexuality" which was present both in the person of Marian Evans and the work of George Eliot. The concept of "dark night of the soul," often associated with Eliot's characters, is, of course, a phrase familiarly ascribed to Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross.

During the years 1841 and 1842, Marian met many distinguished radical thinkers at the home of the Brays. Their discussions centered primarily on religion, philosophy, and personal relevance in the universe. Within the span of several months, Marian Evans developed into the

incisive and independent intellectual who would, in a decade, become George Eliot. Concurrent with her close association with the visitors at the Bray household, she moved away from her former acceptance of the Evangelical Church and demonstrated her rejection of formal religious dogma and rubrics by refusing to attend church with her father.⁴

According to Bernard J. Paris, after Marian Evans broke with Christianity, she

still lived in a universe which was divinely sustained and directed. . . . [Although she] no longer believed in personal immortality, she still felt that man's spiritual nature linked him to God. . . . From Hennell, Spinoza, Wordsworth, Carlyle, and Bray, she derived a pantheism in which God is immanent in the laws of nature and the mind of man. The universe is benevolently disposed toward man and is responsive to the needs of the human heart. ("Religion" 11)

At least for a time, Marian Evans was satisfied with the idea that pantheism gave her a "sense of religious orientation in the cosmos" (Paris, "Religion" 21).

Marian Evans's professional writing experience began in 1844 with her translation of David Friedrich Strauss's Das Leben Jesu (The Life of Jesus). After the death of her father in 1849, Miss Evans spent time at Geneva and worked on her translation of Spinoza's Tractatus-Theologico-Politicus. When she returned to England, she met John Chapman at Rosehill. Through him Marian became acquainted with "eminent writers and intellectuals, British and foreign; among them Herbert Spencer, with whom she fell in

love. He regarded her as the 'most admirable woman, mentally' he had ever met; they had many philosophical discussions" (Pinion x). Chapman owned the Westminster Review and persuaded Marian to move to his home in London and become the editor of his periodical. By the fall of 1851, Marian Evans had accumulated considerably more radical views--both philosophically and theologically. The Westminster Review was "founded originally as the voice of Philosophic Radicalism" and in the time of Miss Evans was the "organ of liberal opinion among the great quarterlies of the day" (Pinney, Introduction 1).

George Henry Lewes worked on a radical weekly newspaper, The Leader, which he and his friend, Thornton Leigh Hunt, had founded in 1849. Lewes was a friend of Spencer's, and it was Spencer who introduced Marian Evans to Mr. Lewes late in 1851. On Marian's thirty-third birthday, 22 November 1852, Lewes took her to dinner (Haight, Biography 127-28), and within a few years, Lewes and Evans began their common-law life together--a pair of radicals united by unconventionalism and a total intellectual and physical exchange.

At this period in Marian Evans Lewes's life, she began to move away from a belief in pantheism and toward the theological stance of the "secular humanism that characterizes her mature thought and art" (Paris, Experiments 11). Her experience of translating Ludwig

Feuerbach's Das Wesen Des Christenthums (The Essence of Christianity), published in 1854, brought her to the belief that man's purpose on earth was to serve his fellow man. Rejection of God was a frightening concept. It left her

in a universe that was unrelated to any value-giving supernatural order. The old questions of purpose and value had to be grappled with all over again, and there was nothing built into the order of things to assure that there were any answers. (Paris, Experiments 21)

Through an exchange of ideas with Lewes, Chapman, and Bray, Evans overcame the unsettling effect that the idea of a godless world had on her and replaced it with a humanistic doctrine of sympathy, which not only stabilized her stance but which allowed her to form an ordered philosophy of life in a world in which God did not exist. "Community thus [took] on the characteristics usually attributed to God." The community became the center of all that was sacred. It represented the whole of human existence (Bedient 49). This final position, that of finding religious value in humanity, "spared [Marian Evans] the tortuous despair which afflicted most of her contemporaries who also found it necessary to face the consequences of there being no God" (Redinger 73). The positive aspects of man living for his fellow man, of man contributing to the growth of humankind, of man doing his small part to better the universe, gave both Evans and Lewes a sense of purpose which allowed them to prepare a legacy for those who followed them so that the world might become a better place

because of their having been here.

This position of attempting to alter society so that it might become fundamentally better is very close to the philosophy of John Stuart Mill, a system of thought with which Eliot was familiar. Mill considered this ideal to be the basic means of achieving personal happiness and the necessary prerequisite for man's sense of fellowship with his brothers (Mintz 48). Since man's secular activity no longer needed to occur in a God-controlled world where salvation was dependent upon the objective and somewhat mysterious judgment of a Supreme Being with regard to the absolute merits of man's actions, this same activity would now take place in an anthropocentric world and be judged on the human level of its success (Mintz 11). The principal anxiety left for man in his secular milieu was that of accomplishing some personal work which would somehow create sufficient ripples to redirect the course of human life. What attracted George Eliot to this aspect of Mill's philosophy was

the thought that at a certain moment in history--on the eve of reform--there existed the possibility that vast reservoirs of ambitious energy and practical knowledge could be released on behalf of the great causes of the age: scientific discovery, philanthropy and benevolence, political reform and humanistic learning. (Mintz 17)

Although Eliot obviously did not accept the whole of either Mill's philosophy or that of Feuerbach regarding man's existence in the universe, Feuerbach's positive view

of other human beings radically changed her individual relationships with others. His philosophy pointed out that

when fellow creatures replace divinity, they cease to be enemies and become . . . an infinitely valuable resource. . . . In this reciprocal relation one individual extends and completes the best possibilities of the other. (Ermarth 25)

This conviction evokes reverence of one human being for another and of the individual for mankind. The mind comprehends the "infinite possibilities of the species" (Ermarth 24) which somehow fully replaces the concept of God as the infinite and sustaining Other.

This position is very close to the philosophy of the modern Existentialists. There is, of course, no justification for aligning George Eliot with the twentieth-century Existentialist movement per se; however, as previously indicated by Felicia Bonaparte, there are multiple and distinct aspects in both the life and the fiction of Eliot which are existential, in the generic sense, and which clearly anticipate several of the more formal doctrines of the specific Existentialist philosophical movement as it is described by Jean-Paul Sartre. Eliot's thinking, as well as the thinking of Bray, Chapman, and Lewes, foreshadow Existentialism in a very real way.

In his lecture, "Existentialism is a Humanism," Sartre both presents and refutes objections to his philosophy and then applies its principles to literature by

using examples drawn from fiction, including George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss (308). Like Eliot, Sartre believed that man learns vicarious lessons through experience with reading. He defends Existentialism, in general, and Existentialist literature, in particular, by indicating the following positive criteria without which, according to him, no person, character, or work can be said to be Existential: 1) An individual must be confronted with the possibility of free choice; 2) His existence must clearly precede his essence; that is, he must become what he makes of himself; 3) His development must grow from subjective to objective; 4) He must feel total responsibility for what he is; 5) He must feel responsibility for all of mankind; 6) He must commit himself to a goal, that is, be engagé; 7) There can be no determinism--nothing to interfere with his freedom; 8) He must be totally responsible for his own passion; 9) There can be no reality except in action--physical or intellectual; 10) The issue of the existence of God is not important; what is important, however, is that the Existentialist not be satisfied with any single system of doctrine or predetermined entire list of beliefs or rules which would interfere with his freedom of choice and his motion toward objectivity.⁵

Sartre continues to explain that in Existentialist literature, as in any other kind of literature, an author

often portrays a character as base, weak, cowardly, or evil. But the difference which clearly makes a work Existential is that the character is given full responsibility for his base, weak, cowardly, or evil traits, that he is seen as having made himself into whatever reprehensible type he has become, and finally that he is indeed guilty of whatever mischief he has created (301). Both in life and in literature, one who blames his evil deeds on his own passion or on his heredity and/or environment, violates the basic principles of Existentialism and engages in self-deception (mauvaise foi). Eliot's affinity with these principles will be a major consideration throughout the succeeding chapters as her modern characteristics are examined in detail.

Despite an obvious compatibility between the philosophy of Sartre and the beliefs of George Eliot, she would probably object to the label "Existentialist" as she would to the category of "Victorian" or "Romantic." For Eliot, labels were things to be avoided. She resisted personal interviews so critics would not label her; and she refused biographical data to the editor of the 1862 edition of Men of the Time because she simply wanted her novels read and appreciated by the public in an unbiased manner (Haight, Selected Letters 447). Accordingly, after her break from Evangelism, Eliot repeatedly refused to align herself with any specific philosophical or theological

group--even when the teachings of the group seemed very close to her personal convictions. For example,

the Positivists strove vainly to enlist her in their movement. Her friendship with the wife of Richard Congreve drew her interest in, but not her adhesion to, his Religion of Humanity. Frederic Harrison tried repeatedly to persuade her to write prayers or ceremonial liturgy for his branch of Positivism. (Haight, Selected Letters 313)

Just as she incorporated certain teachings of Feuerbach, Hegel, and Mill into her personal philosophy, George Eliot accepted much of the Positivism of Comte and his followers.

In essence, Positivism taught that history progressed in three stages: 1)Theological--in which God explained the world; 2)Metaphysical--in which abstract forces still controlled by divinity sustained the world; and 3)Positivistic--in which the world is explained through scientific observation. In addition to this, Positivism viewed man as essentially social and sympathetic--a concept which coincided with the deepest beliefs of George Eliot. Bernard J. Paris likens the personal development of George Eliot to Comte's three phases:

her approach to reality was first theological, then metaphysical, and finally positivistic. The mature George Eliot sought to reconcile the satisfaction of the needs of the heart, which was the great strength of the old creeds, with the allegiance to empirically verifiable truth that was the foundation of modern thought. (1)

However, despite her conviction that the world had reached its Positivistic stage (because of the scientific findings of Darwin and his contemporaries), although she

harbored no ill will against those who were proponents of Positivism or any other specific philosophical or theological sect, and regardless of the similarity between Harrison's Doctrine of Sympathy and her own beliefs, Eliot simply refused to put herself into a position which might close her mind and her judgment to new and different ideas. She followed the dictates of her inner self, her "divine echo," and maintained her position of absolute individualism. Walter Kaufman, reflecting Sartre, identifies this very refusal to affiliate with any existing system of thought as reaching the Existentialist ideal:

The refusal to belong to any school of thought, the repudiation of the adequacy of any body of beliefs whatever, and especially of systems, and a marked dissatisfaction with traditional philosophy as superficial, academic, and remote from life--that is the heart of Existentialism. (12)

And so, it would seem that the refusal to affiliate, ironically, affiliates the refuser with at least a portion of the "doctrine" of Existentialism; and since the Existentialist has to seek his own truth by examining all of the truth available to him, it seems reasonable to assume that one who builds his life on this basic Existential principle must be de facto an eclectic.

The compatibility of the beliefs of George Eliot and those of Jean-Paul Sartre produces a long list. Both were seriously concerned about ethics and morality. Both saw the responsible and concerned individual as the source of moral order. Eliot's belief in the power of the moral

order was so strong that Bernard Paris calls it her principle "which [made] the world habitable for the human spirit and . . . the source of human values" ("Religion" 19). Eliot and Sartre are in agreement that, in a positivistic manner, the moral order moves the world from the chaos of subjectivity to the harmony of objectivity. In the personal philosophy of George Eliot, individuals who are caught up into the subjective view are considered selfish and egotistical; those who, on the other hand, are objective in their evaluations of things are believed altruistic and giving. Paris believes that

in George Eliot's view, we are all born egoists. Both the individual and the race, in their childhood, regard the world almost entirely from the subjective point of view. Maturation is the process of recognizing the independent existence of outer phenomena, of yielding up the absolute supremacy of the self.

(Experiments 83)

Eliot's life and work represent the conviction that the movement toward objectivity makes man's life meaningful and establishes him as a positive influence in society.

This intense interest in the moral order in no way categorizes George Eliot as a moralist. She detested Evangelism and "frequently and explicitly repudiated didacticism" (Paris, Experiments 3). However, once God and Christianity were no longer the mediators between self and the world, man somehow had to assume that role. Morality is a system, and the need for morality demands that those within the system answer to someone. The idea of man's

being accountable only to man for his actions was a matter of great concern to George Eliot. The problems she foresaw with the development of a secular ethic were almost insurmountable. However, given a world in which men move away from egoism and toward altruism, that is, away from subjectivity and toward objectivity, an effective, secular moral order becomes a distinct possibility.

* * * * *

According to J. Hillis Miller, "When Marian Evans became George Eliot she did so by assuming the personality of a Feuerbachian general consciousness, the mind not of specific society but of all humanity" (113). With the encouragement of George Henry Lewes, Marian began her career as a fiction writer in 1856. In "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," she had already expressed her negative sentiments regarding females who write because they have nothing better to do and who produce inconsequential stories which reflect no real life experience. Although George Eliot admired Mme de Staël, George Sand, Amandine Dupin, Jane Austen, and the Brontës, she chose to dissociate herself from the numerous frivolous "Lady Novelists" who were "inexperienced in every form of poverty except poverty of brains" (303).

For several personal and professional reasons, Miss Evans chose to publish her first novel and all of her

subsequent fiction using the masculine pseudonym, George Eliot. At this early stage of her life with Lewes, although she was feeling very womanly, there were powerful masculine demands within her which sought an outlet (Redinger 285). One of these masculine drives was a need to compete as a man in a man's world. She wanted her work to be taken seriously and accepted as equal in the literary marketplace then dominated by Dickens and Thackeray. However, as important as these drives were, and as important as money was to George Eliot, these were not the primary motivating forces which drove her. She saw as her "highest vocation" the goal of representing things as they existed in reality (Bedient 81). These "things" include not only objective reality and man's physical appearance, but the realities of man's place in the universe, his personal responsibility for his own life and the lives of others, his psychological and motivational drives, his freedom, his emotions, and his unique blend of strengths and weaknesses.

Despite George Eliot's dislike for didacticism and preaching, she believed that any "man or woman who publishes writings . . . assumes the office of teacher and influencer of the public mind" ("Note-Book" 440). As an "influencer of the public mind," she attempted to demonstrate the value of altruism, the negative effects of egoism, the necessity of thoughtful contemplation, and

individual responsibility for self and for others; but

[Eliot] did not approach this task by preaching that we should love our neighbors, or practice the golden rule, or exercise our free will to choose virtue; rather she sought to enlarge our vision and sympathy by vividly and sympathetically presenting the interior states of her characters. In life we are isolated from our fellows, with only a very indirect access to their consciousness. In reading novels in which the psychology of the characters is realistically portrayed we have a direct experience of the inner states of others and an immediate intuition of our common humanity. (Paris, Experiments 126-27)

This totality of human experience, which Eliot attempted to communicate through her novels, reached a dimension which Henry James saw as "more philosophic--more broadly intelligent" ("Review" 86-87) than that achieved by any of her peers. He believes that Eliot

commissioned herself to be real, her native tendency being that of an idealist, and the intellectual result is a very fertilizing mixture. The constant presence of thought, of generalizing instinct, of brain, in a work, behind her observation, gives the latter its great value and her whole manner its high superiority. It denotes a mind in which imagination is illuminated by faculties rarely found in fellowship with it. In this respect--in that broad reach of vision which would make the worthy historian of solemn fact as well as wanton fiction--George Eliot seems to us among English romancers to stand alone. . . . To our mind, she . . . is really philosophic.

("Review" 88-89)

As James judges Eliot to be an intellectual and a philosopher, Richard Burton views her as "a seer using fiction as a means to an end--and that end the betterment of mankind" (243), and Joan Bennett calls her "an innovator." Bennett notes that

the organic or living form of [Eliot's] novels, within the expected framework, is different from anything that

had gone before. . . . George Eliot was aware of the ethical, religious and social conventions of the world she paints as a product of history, evolved in time and changing with time. She was consciously interested in the pressure all these exert on individual lives and in the existence of a problem concerned with resisting or succumbing to that pressure. (100-01)

This type of pressure necessarily probes the depths of the psyche and presents the reader with a view of another human being undergoing internal conflict and confusion.

Eliot's art was her contribution to those members of humanity who were present in the world with her and to those who would participate in the human experience in the future. Marian Evans Lewes wanted desperately to be taken seriously as a novelist in a world where serious novelists --for the most part--were men. George Eliot accomplished that challenging and difficult task. The Eliot novels do offer, to those who would listen, insights into the inner struggles of others and, therefore, a better understanding of the human condition. A critical thinker, a religious-become-secular humanist, a philosopher/intellectual in her own right, George Eliot saw herself as a writer who, by her works, could communicate certain important principles to mankind. She pursued this end with vigor and dedication and, based on our observation of growth and change in her work as she moved from text to text, we can see that Eliot continually examined both the relevance of her message and the excellence of her performance. Although her viewpoint became more refined as her life progressed, it never really

varied in its basic principle of seeking truth and inspiration wherever they could be found and of using them to build a life philosophy that would produce integrity and fulfillment both for herself and for anyone with whom she could communicate. From this well-wrought viewpoint emerged her vision regarding man's potential positive and even salvific powers. As a young woman, Marian Evans was "tormented by a sense of a large but undefined destiny" (Redinger 71); as George Eliot she was able to work at fulfilling that destiny to the best of her ability.

In his philosophy, Jean-Paul Sartre defines the true Existentialist as one who is engagé, that is, one who is "wholly involved in his work." That individual comprehends where he must go; he constantly moves in a direction toward his goal; and he continually re-evaluates not only his progress but also his means and course of action. Eliot was an individual who was definitely engagé. She gave her life over to the writing of fiction. To her, as we have previously indicated, this was a serious and responsible profession. Bedient explains that with religion gone, "it [was] hard to sacrifice without an altar." However, for George Eliot, "the altar erected was the development of Humanity" (51), and her means for reaching and helping humanity was her writing. Richard Burton notes that "Dickens in his beautiful tribute to Thackeray on the latter's death, speaks of the failure of

the author of 'Pendennis' to take his mission, his genius, seriously." To my knowledge, this criticism has never been leveled at George Eliot. Burton, in his comments on Eliot, states that "she took more seriously her aim of interpreting life, and had a higher conception of her artistic mission" (219) than did other writers of her time.

"Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself," writes Sartre. "That is the first principle of Existentialism." The primary effect of this philosophy is that it places "man in possession of himself as he is, and places the entire responsibility for his existence squarely upon his own shoulders" (291), a challenge which, for George Eliot, was positively accepted and aggressively pursued. The second, but equally important, principle of Existentialism is man's shared responsibility for the advancement of the race. This concept is set forth by Kafka in Der Prozess and by Sartre in Le Sursis. Although an individual's own potential and self-defined purpose in life seem to belong only to him, because of the outcome of his actions and their effect on all of mankind, these seemingly private driving forces cannot be considered exclusively his. They become the "property" of everyone (Desan 67). Of Eliot, Felicia Bonaparte writes: "[Her] conviction that all human life is spatially and temporally interrelated must lead necessarily to the view that there can be no natural terminations to the webs of human

activity" (40). Based on this evaluation and others like it, we can propose the simple truth that, without knowing it and without labeling it such, Eliot established for herself a life philosophy, which reflects in her fiction, that is Existential in nature and eclectic in style.

Because of her all-encompassing vision and her openness to all philosophical and literary stimuli, George Eliot was able to blend Romanticism with Realism, fiction with life, peasant with aristocrat. She eclectically adopted parts of various established systems of thought and values and adjusted both her life and her writing to a world in which the theists and the atheists worked side by side. She was equally comfortable in the quiet of her own study and in the drawing rooms of the intellectually elite. She loved the simplicity of childhood and appreciated the problems of maturity and old age, and, unlike any of her peers, she could identify with both the masculine and the feminine psyche. George Eliot was and was not a Victorian and a nineteenth-century woman. The vision which allowed her to be both was the same vision which would not let her be confined by the conventions and limitations of her era. Ian Adam believes that her novels "point to the future" (6), and Bonaparte holds that Eliot wrote them in that manner consciously:

It was always Eliot's purpose to write not in her time but for the future into which she attempted to take her readers. Although in many ways we have not yet arrived

at the future Eliot envisioned, we are, far more than our predecessors, Eliot's contemporary readers. . . . She knew very well that every universe must make its own morality; and her morality, in which she encompasses the whole range of human life, like Camus's --and the analogy is not a casual one--can be understood only in the context of her dark, relentless vision. (x)

Intellectually and psychologically, George Eliot was a citizen of the modern world.

Chapter II

Scenes of Clerical Life

In the man whose childhood has known caresses there is always a fibre of memory that can be touched to gentle issues.

George Eliot, "Janet's Repentance"

One of the themes of George Eliot's essay, "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," is the idea that effective writing cannot occur unless authors write about subjects with which they are thoroughly familiar. When the time came for Eliot to begin writing her own novels, she exhibited absolute fidelity to this ideal. The character-types, settings, and situations depicted in her fiction represent a world about which Eliot was totally knowledgeable, that of nineteenth-century English provincial society. After her break from Christianity, her affiliation with Chapman and his radical publication, and her unconventional liaison with Lewes, George Eliot was cut off from Warwickshire and the personal ties of her youth. This painful severance caused her to recreate nostalgically the time, the country, and the people in her memory and in her books. Because the ideals of provincial society were at the center of the milieu in which she grew up, their impressions remained with her throughout her career as a

writer. There was no society better known to George Eliot than that of the countryside of her youth. Perhaps she wrote about country society because she knew it best; perhaps she made rural communities the center of the action in her novels because she grasped the drama of the common man; and again, according to the analysis of J. Hillis Miller, perhaps her fascination with provincial society grew from the same source as did James Joyce's preoccupation with Ireland. Miller believes that

just as James Joyce's one subject is the Dublin from which he ha[d] exiled himself, so George Eliot, from a similar isolation, turn[ed] back in nostalgic revery to memories of her childhood and beg[an] writing the novels which re-create[d] Warwickshire society and explore[d] its laws. (55)

In his Introduction to Scenes of Clerical Life, David Lodge refers to "Silly Novels" as "the clearest indication in George Eliot's criticism of what she was aiming to do and to avoid" as a writer of fiction (17). Since most of the novels which she reviewed in the essay were religious in nature, she had this to say about them.

As a general rule, the ability of a lady novelist to describe actual life and her fellow-men is in inverse proportion to her confident eloquence about God and the other world, and the means by which she actually chooses to conduct you to true ideas of the invisible is a totally false picture of the visible.

("Silly Novels" 311)

Eliot saw incongruities and pretensions in the novels mentioned in the essay because of the preoccupation of their creators with the wealth of the aristocracy and the mystical elements of the world beyond. She believed that

the real drama of the time existed in "the middle and lower classes" for any potential writer "who ha[d] genius enough to discern and reproduce it" ("Silly Novels" 318). Jerome Thale believes that "like Wordsworth George Eliot t[ook] the rustics and their world soberly, with a steady gravity, giving them dignity and simplicity" (17), and it is out of this mixture of love for the environs of her youth, nostalgic sorrow at being isolated from the ties of her early years, and deep respect for the joys and heartbreaks of insignificant peasants--as they go about their daily lives--that the Clerical Scenes and subsequent novels grew. The characters were suggested by many of the acquaintances of her childhood, but in writing her novels George Eliot was not really interested in "tracing individual lives with historical accuracy. Thus her memory was free to assume greater creativity than that involved in simple recall" (Redinger 318). Ruby Redinger believes that "autobiographical elements float through [Eliot's stories] in surrealist fashion" (318) and are found particularly in the passages which deal with the characters and settings indigenous to provincial society.

Scenes of Clerical Life was published as a series of vignettes about the rural lives of three specific Evangelists. George Eliot believed that there was drama--the stuff out of which plots are made--in Evangelism. In her eyes, the Evangelical movement--more than any other

rural social entity--contained its own built-in conflicts and psychological pressures. Clerics are one of the few groups allowed to penetrate into the thoughts of others. They, therefore, serve as a means toward exploring the inner conflicts of confused and suffering human beings. They are privy to the ambitions, the transgressions, and the guilt of peasant and aristocrat alike; and because of their experience with analyzing and evaluating the situations of others, they are generally very adept at self-analysis, self-direction, and self-contempt. All of these characteristics allow for the psychological emphasis and the sympathetic exposure of suffering humanity which are so prevalent in the Clerical Scenes. The rustic setting and characters reflect Wordsworth; the mores of the rising middle class are reminiscent of Austen; the interaction of the uneducated and the needy mirrors Dickens; and the psychological probing and the sense of alienation foreshadow James and the modern novelists.

In the days of her youth, George Eliot believed that clergymen were great forces in their own towns. The Clerical Scenes examine three specific clergymen as human beings rather than as churchmen. She exposes their frailties, their inadequacies, their misjudgments, and their failures, as well as their good will, their sympathy, and their sense of responsibility. Her exposition of Amos Barton, Maynard Gilfil, and Edgar Tryan is exactly as

George Henry Lewes described it in his letter to John Chapman. He explained that the Clerical Scenes would

consist of tales and sketches illustrative of the actual life of our country clergy about a quarter of a century ago; but solely in its human and not at all in its theological aspect; the object being to do what has never yet been done in our Literature, for we have had abundant religious stories polemical and doctrinal, but since the "Vicar" and Miss Austen, no stories representing the clergy like any other class with the humours, sorrows, and troubles of other men.

(Letters 2: 269)

Scenes of Clerical Life probes conflicts between sexuality and self-sacrifice, hope and despair, and freedom and constraint strictly from a viewpoint of secular humanism. The text examines people, in general, and clergymen, in particular, as they undergo their individual "dark night of the soul"; it exposes their personal pain as they encounter life while pursuing or neglecting the business of their "trade"--that is, serving others.

* * * * *

According to Ruby Redinger, the first Clerical Scene, entitled "The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton," was "an offshoot of [Eliot's] antagonism" for "the hypocrisy she had come to detect in certain exponents of many of the beliefs she had once tried to live by." George Eliot's "target is ever the perversion of religious ideas by the individuals under attack, and not the ideas themselves," explains Redinger (102). In October of 1855, Eliot published an essay which she called "Evangelical

Teaching: Dr. Cumming" in the Westminster Review. In it she denounced the typical individual who called himself an Evangelist and with whom she identified the Evangelism she knew in her youth:

Given, a man with moderate intellect, a moral standard not higher than the average, some rhetorical affluence and great glibness of speech, what is the career in which, without the aid of birth or money, he may most easily attain power and reputation in English society: Where is that Goshen of mediocrity in which a smattering of science and learning will pass for profound instruction, where platitudes will be accepted as wisdom, bigoted narrowness as holy zeal, unctuous egoism as God-given piety? Let such a man become an evangelical preacher; he will then find it possible to reconcile small ability with great ambition, superficial knowledge with prestige of erudition, a middling morale with a high reputation for sanctity.

(159-60)

Ms. Redinger believes that "Amos Barton" was the fictional counterpart of the "Dr. Cumming" essay, which was written less than a year before "Amos" came into being (102).

Barbara Hardy judges the Rev. Amos Barton to be a "faithful portrait of human inadequacy" (Novels 16). Her comment is, no doubt, based on the words of Eliot's narrator:

The Rev. Amos Barton, whose sad fortunes I have undertaken to relate, was, you perceive, in no respect an ideal or exceptional character; and perhaps I am doing a bold thing to bespeak your sympathy on behalf of a man who was so very far from remarkable,--a man whose virtues were not heroic, and who had no undetected crime within his breast; who had not the slightest mystery hanging about him, but was palpably and unmistakably commonplace. (Ch. 5, 80)

Barton is no hero to anyone--not to his peers, not to his parishoners, not to his family, not to his friends. The

only things which make Amos Barton important to the reader are his naive innocence (perhaps stupidity) and his quiet acquiescence to both suffering and change. The narrator tells us that Barton "had to stand single-handed" in this "stronghold of Satan" and "summon it to surrender," (Ch. 2, 60) and, of course, our image of Amos Barton is one of the man who cannot even stand up to Countess Caroline Czerlaski and ask her to leave his home so that Millie, his wife, can rest easier on her deathbed. Eliot's narrator explains to the reader that "Amos Barton thought himself strong, he did not feel himself strong. Nature had given him the opinion, but not the sensation" (Ch. 2, 60), and the narrator then challenges the openness and receptivity of the reader as he explains that "it is only the very largest souls who will be able to appreciate and pity [Amos Barton]--who will discern and love sincerity of purpose amid all the bungling feebleness of achievement" (Ch. 2, 61).

Amos Barton is a nobody, but, as the narrator asks, "is there not a pathos in [his] very insignificance?" (Ch. 5, 81). Conversing with the reader, the narrator counsels:

You would gain unspeakably if you would learn with me to see some of the poetry and the pathos, the tragedy and the comedy, lying in the experience of a human soul that looks out through dull grey eyes, and that speaks in a voice of quite ordinary tones. (Ch. 5, 81)

Here, David Lodge, the editor, indicates that in the original manuscript Eliot has the narrator continue: ". . . and whose daily actions the recording angel probably

enters into the celestial ledger chiefly by the word ditto" (418). And so, the reader is challenged to appreciate the drama of the ordinary and to empathize with one who cannot even be great in his moment of loss. The parishioners of Amos Barton "were more likely to have a strong sense that the clergyman needed their material aid, than that they needed his spiritual aid" (Ch. 5, 83-84). His life accomplishes nothing; there is a certain absurdity to it. He is a stranger, of sorts, a clergyman whose hollow life as spiritual head of the Shepperton Church ends in a way best described by T. S. Eliot in "The Hollow Men"--"Not with a bang but a whimper."

"The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton," like the Lyrical Ballads, is often "dismissed as mere sentimental apprentice-work" when, in fact, it "grew out of many years' wide-ranging study and emotional experience" (Oldfield 1). It is dominated by the philosophy of Feuerbach, for whom "theology was anthropology" (Oldfield 2). True as it might be that "in Amos Barton George Eliot is . . . ill at ease with what is necessarily the author's godlike role, and keeps interrupting the narrative to explain just why she is going to follow one character back to his home rather than another" (Oldfield 13), the work is anything but literary "wing testing." The fact that George Eliot began her career in fiction with "Amos Barton" must be tempered with the truth that prior to her experience with fiction, Eliot

was an acclaimed journalist, critic, translator, and essayist.

According to U. C. Knoepfelmacher, the engagé Eliot, who always had conscious purpose in her writing,

set out to shatter a complacent and commonplace clergyman's indifference to the sufferings of his fellow mortals. The plot is mechanical and sentimental: the unexpected death of Barton's "sweet" wife Milly impresses on him the precariousness of earthly life and forces him into an awareness of George Eliot's own temporal "religion of humanity."

(Early Novels 5)

There is little doubt about Amos Barton's lack of theological depth. He knows almost nothing about preaching; he offers neither comfort nor instruction to his flock; he is an unfeeling man--not because he chooses to be so, but because he is incapable of sensitivity and perception. Not only is he a failure as a man of God, but he is also a failure as a human being. He is, to use the words which George Eliot applied to the poet Edward Young, "deficient in sympathetic emotion" ("Worldliness" 379), which makes him reprehensible in her eyes, even if her portrayal of him only makes him pathetic in ours.

This seemingly contradictory statement can be best explained by Neil Roberts, who observes that in all of George Eliot's novels--particularly in the earlier ones--there exists a tension and a conflict of her own as she struggled between "her didacticism and her creative sympathy" (69). She set out to recreate the Dr. Cumming of her scathing essay and ended by allowing her own human

sympathy to reach out to her fictional creation, Amos Barton. This personal sympathy of Eliot's is also partly responsible for the sentimentality that is so obvious in the plot.

Milly's deathbed scene is fraught with melodrama and "sweet" sentiment. It is not nearly as emotionally strong as the Hetty/Dinah prison scene of Adam Bede. "Amos Barton" fails to integrate Eliot's two orders of reality--the romantic and the realistic. The stark realities of Milly's death, the motherless children, and the bereaved husband lose their impact as Patty, the eldest girl, is told by the dying woman: "I'm going away from you. Love your papa. Comfort him; and take care of your little brothers and sisters. God will help you," and the child simply replies, "Yes, mamma" (Ch. 8, 108). This exchange is followed by a farewell to her husband and by Mrs. Barton's final words, "Music--music--didn't you hear it?" This unrealistic portrayal of death compounded with the otherwise passive Amos "shrieking" that his wife was not dead and having to be "dragged out of the room" (Ch. 8, 109) exhibit a sentimentality and melodrama not present in the later novels.

There is no doubt that George Eliot's first works of fiction demonstrate the effects which the literary practices of her time and the conventions of Romantic novelists had on her. These early works were also

influenced by her own need to make an impact upon the minds of her readers. As her experience with writing fiction grew, many of these imitative practices either disappeared or changed. For example, sentimentality and melodrama eventually developed into profound emotion and tragedy. "Amos Barton" is far from a tragedy, but it was a respectable beginning to what Thomas A. Noble calls "a significant departure in the history of English fiction" (vii).

* * * * *

After reading the second of the Clerical Scenes, Eliot's publisher, John Blackwood, assuming it had been created by a man, wrote to George Eliot: "Many men write well and tell a story well, but few possess the art of giving individuality to their characters so happily and easily as you in both these stories" (Letters 2, 297). With regard to this statement, critics generally agree that "Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story . . . sprang from a much deeper stratum of self" (Redinger 318) than did "Amos Barton." What basically happens in the "Gilfil" story is that Caterina (Tina) Sarti becomes the central character and gives George Eliot the first of a long line of heroines through whom she can speak. Redinger attributes Eliot's identification with Miss Sarti to Tina's being "an alien in Cheverel Manor as George Eliot had felt herself to be in

her own home" (318). Tina is orphaned, expected to marry as a duty, taken in by the charms of Anthony Wybrow, and alienated from those with whom she was raised. She represents a blend of the naive romantic, the self-exiled realist, and modern isolated human being.

At the beginning of the story, George Eliot allows herself some indulgence in Wordsworthian description as she relates Caterina's evening stroll with Mrs. Hartopp at Cheverel Manor:

The soft turf gives way even under the fairy tread of the younger lady, whose small stature and slim figure rest on the tiniest of full-grown feet. She trips along before the elder, carrying the cushions, which she places in the favourite spot, just on the slope by a clump of laurels, where they can see the sunbeams sparkling among the water-lilies. (Ch. 2, 132)

Eliot further demonstrates her Romantic love for nature as she imagines that there could have been "some English Watteau" present who might have painted the

row of tall pines, alongside the pool--on the left branching out among swelling grassy mounds, surmounted by clumps of trees, where the red trunk of the Scotch fir glows in the descending sunlight against the bright green of limes and acacias; the great pool, where a pair of swans are swimming laxily with one leg tucked under a wing, and where the open water-lilies lie calmly accepting the kisses of the fluttering light-sparkles. (Ch. 2, 133-34)

This type of descriptive "flight of fancy" diminishes as Eliot grows in her confidence as a creator of characters rather than a painter of settings. Joan Bennett explains that "though George Eliot's pathos was at first tainted with current literary fashion, or laid on too thick because

of her mistrust of her powers in that line, she soon mastered the art of communicating her own sympathy with human suffering" (94) and concentrated her detailed descriptions on the inner workings of the psyche and the motivational and moral development of her characters.

Eliot believed that much human suffering was caused by those who lack a strong perspective. This principle is demonstrated to a much greater degree in "Mr. Gilfil" than it is in "Amos Barton." One of Eliot's requirements for morality was "regarding others as they are in and for themselves, as beings with subjectivities like our own" (Paris, Experiments 126). This story portrays Maynard Gilfil as the selfless and totally moral individual. In Knoepfmacher's eyes, he is "a figure who inhabits and accepts the world from which Barton is banished" (Early Novels 62)--the world of those who reach out to others, the world of sympathy. As the suitor designated for Tina by her guardian, Sir Christopher, the Reverend Mr. Gilfil expects to marry the lovely daughter of an Italian musician. However, when he recognizes her strong attraction for Anthony Wybrow, Gilfil quietly warns her that "the peace of the whole family depends on your power of governing yourself" (Ch. 9, 191). He sincerely confesses his own love for her and reassures her that he will make no demands on her other than those which are for her own good:

I hope you will not be hurt, Caterina, by what I am going to say to you. I do not speak from any other feelings than real affection and anxiety for you. I put everything else out of the question. You know you are more to me than all the world; but I will not thrust before you a feeling which you are unable to return. (Ch. 9, 189)

Gilfil's willingness to place Caterina's good and the good of her family before his own desires makes him the moral center of a text written by an author who firmly believed that moral behavior was measured by objectivity and selflessness. This principle is also one of Sartre's requirements for compatibility with true Existentialism. Gilfil is not simply a romantic hero; his actions also anticipate a much later literary trend.

Wybrow, on the other hand, is the epitome of the melodramatic villain. He is self-centered, dishonest, and totally inconsiderate of the feelings and well-being of others. Eliot's narrator tells the reader that Anthony "must have been a reckless libertine to win [Caterina's] affections" when he knew that it would have been ridiculous to think of marrying her and that Wybrow "really felt very kindly towards her, and would very likely have loved her--if he had been able to love any one" (Ch. 4, 164). Wybrow, according to both the narrator and Mr. Gilfil, teased and trifled with the gullible Miss Sarti and viewed her as one to be "petted and played with" (Ch. 8, 186); and she, taking his flirtations as signs of deep affection, responded with an emotional and a possessive love.

Tina Sarti was indeed capable of great passion. Her Italian nature was quick to love and quick to avenge itself. After Caterina's realization of what she termed Anthony's "deliberate, gratuitous cruelty" (Ch. 12, 205), she secured a dagger and made her way to the Rookery where she knew that she would find him. The feeling which she had mistaken for hatred of Anthony was really only the retaliatory response of a spurned lover. The act of killing Anthony would have been, for Caterina, a totally selfish act, and, therefore in the eyes of George Eliot, a totally immoral one. But Tina is saved from committing that violent act by Wybrow's untimely death; and in her being saved she finds a way out of her own selfishness. She experiences guilt, which is the first step toward sorrow and renewal. Caterina Sarti retreats into solitude to do penance for a crime which she perpetrated only in the privacy of her own consciousness, but, as she later explains to Maynard, "when I meant to do it, . . . it was as bad as if I had done it" (Ch. 19, 235).

Maynard Gilfil speaks to the troubled Caterina about the fact that everyone has secret sins and that knowing oneself helps individuals not to judge other people harshly (Ch. 19, 236). In essence, what Gilfil does is exactly what a clergyman should do--share human experience with those undergoing the "dark night of the soul" so that they might better accept and understand the human condition. He

represents the noble side of mankind; but because of Gilfil's non-judgmental approach to Caterina and those around her, the reader is led to believe that Maynard, too, at one time has experienced his own darker side and has had to face the guilt, sorrow, and repentance which should follow the shocking realization of one's own selfish activity. Rather than attempt to touch her emotionally through romantic overtures of love, Gilfil buys Tina a harpsicord so that her emotions can gently awaken to the strains of musical expression. His sympathetic appreciation for human nature eventually give him the love of the woman of his heart when "the soul that was born anew to music was born anew to love" (Ch. 20, 241). The clergyman, at long last, is given (or earns) the romantic response of Caterina, marries her, and enjoys their mutual affection until her death when "Maynard Gilfil's love went with her into deep silence for evermore" (Ch. 21, 143).

Throughout the story, the reader is kept apprised of how each of the main characters thinks. The narrator analyzes motivation and choice, shares private emotions, and indicates the thoughts of the main characters. Aside from this, sometimes Eliot reveals the inner feelings of Caterina and Maynard through the vehicle of dialogue. But regardless of the method, it is obvious that Eliot wants the reader to observe the inner workings of the minds and personalities of the main characters in a way which is

impossible in real life. This type of psychological analysis is generally referred to as "modern"--or post-Jamesian. Thomas A. Noble recognizes this trait in Eliot's works. He notes that

one thinks of George Eliot as modern primarily because of her interest in motivation. Unlike Dickens and Trollope, she is not content simply to report the actions of her people; she must examine their minds so that their actions will be psychologically valid. (41)

On this subject, Eliot wrote: "My stories always grow out of my psychological conception of the dramatis personae" (Letters: 2, 298-99), and Caterina Sarti was no exception. Noble evaluates Caterina as a "forerunner, insignificant in comparison perhaps but clearly conceived, of those greater characters from Arthur Donnithorne to Gwendolyn Harleth whose personalities and motives George Eliot analyzes so brilliantly" (42), characters who learn the lessons of life from their own sad--sometimes tragic--experience and from the example and understanding of selfless members of society who reach out to them in response to their need. Although Eliot disliked didacticism, she "believed that it was the artist's duty to teach" (Noble 56). Characters like Tina Sarti and Maynard Gilfil show mankind how all people carry about with them their burdens and how the stronger should help the weaker so that--at a later date--the weak, having become strong, can keep the chain of human sympathy unbroken. For Eliot, this was the most important lesson of life; and because fiction is generally a mirror

of life, fictional persons are able to communicate insights of this type to the reading public. Her religion was secular humanism; her doctrine, selflessness; and her vehicle, fiction.

* * * * *

In "Janet's Repentance," the third and final Clerical Scene, "innovation made its appearance in the person of the Rev. Mr Tryan" (Ch. 2, 263). Despite his wealthy origin, Tryan is an Evangelical clergyman who preaches scriptures in cottages and who mingles with every class of people in Milby parish. His life has been one of attempting to make up for the suicide of a girl whom he, in his youth, started on the path away from conventional behavior. He states that there is only one thing which could make his life tolerable, and that is "to spend all the rest of it in trying to save others from the ruin [he] had brought on one" (Ch. 18, 360). Obviously, Tryan's success in dealing with the sick, the dying, the abused, and the depressed is directly related to his experience with personal sorrow and his resultant determination to make the lives around him better because his has been worse. For Mr. Tryan, guilt, through a conscious process of free and positive choices on his part, evolves into amendment and humanitarian action.

Janet Raynor Dempster, the most intellectual woman

in the town, purchases Tryan's sermons in order to ridicule them. Her husband detests Mr. Tryan and wants to draw up a playbill denigrating Tryan's Sunday night lectures. The pair plan Tryan's embarrassment and that of his followers, the Tryanites. Aside from this obviously negative action, Janet is a woman of mercy and sympathy. She nurses the sick, comforts the grieving, and ministers to the needy. Her lawyer husband, an apoplectic alcoholic, physically and verbally abuses her on a regular basis. She, like Tryan, brings a wealth of compassion to her dealings with suffering humanity because of her personal pain. However, despite all of the moral strength displayed by her during her encounters with those who required care and attention, Janet falls victim to alcoholism and demonstrates her personal need for the help and compassion of a stronger human being.

An integral part of the setting for this Clerical Scene is the point of development which Tryan has reached in his life and the different point of development which Janet has reached in hers when the two cross paths. Tryan has undergone his growth from self-centeredness to altruism, and Janet, although her growth is in process, has reached a point of dire need. This allows Tryan to reach out to Janet when she is in danger of turning back into herself in an embrace of self-pity. Eliot has this meeting occur in the sickroom of consumptive Sally Martin,

where each of them has come to be of assistance to the ailing woman and where Tryan then discovers that Janet's emotional and psychological needs are greater than the physical needs of the dying Sally.

Obviously, there is a parallel between Janet's present stage and one of the past stages of Tryan's life. Eliot's message here is that people have needs which can only be met by other people who are selfless enough to reach out and attempt to give them what they require in their time of need--moral support. This touches on Eliot's definition of "morality," which is based on doing good for others and contributing to the healing and growth of humanity. Since man is born selfish and his object in life, ideally, is to achieve a high level of altruism, he progresses through various stages of his existence learning how to help others from observing the example set by those who have helped him. The lives of Edgar Tryan and Janet Dempster trace similar experiential patterns which reach different levels at different times. Edgar's final altruistic stage is present to help Janet through her guilt stage and move her forward to a point where she can take over his altruistic mission when he can no longer continue his work. "Janet's Repentance" demonstrates these successive stages: negative action; guilt; amendment through the concern and counseling of an objective and altruistic person; and, finally, positive action on the

part of the one who has benefited from the help of another. These are the steps toward ideal human development according to both Eliot's Doctrine of Sympathy and Sartre's view of Existentialistic Humanism.

Bernard J. Paris explains that the basic principle of Eliot's Doctrine of Sympathy is quite simple: "If we live for others, as well as for ourselves, we will have a sense of the indubitable worth of our lives, a worth which is independent of the course of our personal fortunes" ("Religion" 36). Edgar Tryan is the living example of this theory, even as the final stage of development of Janet Dempster is a testimony to its continuity and ultimate worth. This philosophy does not occur in "Janet's Repentance" and the other Scenes of Clerical Life by accident. Eliot, as she attempted to walk the fine line between being didactic and communicating principle, placed it there consciously. In January of 1860, she wrote to John Blackwood:

I am very anxious that the "Scenes of Clerical Life" should have every chance of impressing the public with its existence . . . because there are ideas presented in these stories about which I care a good deal, and am not sure that I can ever embody again.

(Letters 3: 240)

Regarding the infusion of Eliot's Doctrine of Sympathy into specific characters, Ian Adam cites her portrayal of Edgar Tryan as an example. He discusses how Eliot examined her own inner spirit in which she found an all-inclusive mix of feeling and thought and how she

attempted to recreate this profile in characters like Tryan. He observes that

her imagination is obviously one which has been formed by sympathetic experience with other human beings, but it has also been formed by intellectual experience which can provide the deep insights of thought. It is perhaps this fusion of intellectual range and depth with a deep feeling for others which Henry James had in mind when he spoke of her as a "philosophic" novelist--an accurate description if we put the emphasis equally on both words. (George Eliot 2)

George Eliot, herself a delicate blend of thought and feeling, once described Tryan as a man who would "carry the reader's sympathy" and through whom Janet would be brought to repentance (Letters 2: 347)--a goal which, in itself, requires a balanced mix of intellect and emotion.

Repentance also somehow implies religion, even Evangelical religion. However, in the case of Janet, as confessor/cleric, Tryan exhibits "ideals which are above sectarian description. He is unmistakably and believably Evangelical, but his religion is essentially a religion of humanity" (Noble 77). As Lewes stated, Scenes of Clerical Life presents clerics in their role as human beings rather than "in their theological aspect" (Letters 2: 269). Therefore, the salvation and hope which both Gilfil and Tryan offer is one which derives from a religion of humanity, a doctrine of sympathy, a true secular humanism.

It is through the drama of conversion and repentance that a high level of psychological revelation takes place. The narrator tells the reader that "surely the only true

knowledge of our fellow-man is that which enables us to feel with him--which gives us a fine ear for the heart-pulses that are beating under the mere clothes of circumstance and opinion" (Ch. 10, 322). Because Janet is speaking with a cleric, she feels that she can reveal her inner thoughts, her fears, and her weaknesses. The reader is given the opportunity to experience Janet's psyche in a way which is rare for him in his real-life experiences with other human beings. She confides the circumstances of the problems with her marriage to Tryan:

I loved my husband very dearly when we were married, and I meant to make him happy--I wanted nothing else. But he began to be angry with me for little things and . . . I don't want to accuse him . . . but he drank and got more and more unkind to me, and then very cruel, and he beat me. And that cut me to the heart.
(Ch. 18, 356)

She continues by confiding to Tryan how and why she began to drink:

I couldn't bear up against it. I had never been used to drink anything but water. I hated wine and spirits because Robert drank them so; but one day when I was very wretched, and the wine was standing on the table, I suddenly . . . I can hardly remember how I came to do it . . . I poured some wine into a large glass and drank it. It blunted my feelings and made me more indifferent. After that, the temptation was always coming, and it got stronger and stronger. I was ashamed, and I hated what I did; but almost while the thought was passing through my mind that I would never do it again, I did it. It seemed as if there was a demon in me always making me rush to do what I longed not to do. (Ch. 18, 356)

This example of Janet's baring her soul to Tryan demonstrates Eliot's preoccupation with analyzing the motives of her characters as she examined their psyches.

These psychological probings in Eliot usually bring to light the need of the individual for an objective and sympathetic companion who can listen and advise at a time when the character undergoing suffering cannot help himself. It is very possible that passages like this one in Chapter 18 prompted F. R. Leavis, Henry James, and D. H. Lawrence to proclaim that, in their opinion, Eliot's work represented the beginning of the psychological novel.

And yet, in the spirit of her own eclectic style and in the midst of the psychological milieu of the new modern novel, Eliot artistically interjected a touch of Romanticism into the Scenes of Clerical Life. Donald D. Stone believes that

despite her pronouncements to the contrary, the staples of romance abound in the Scenes in the form of angelic martyrs, noble and ignoble sinners, and melodramatic events--and romanticism itself emerges in the author's need to construct ideals and ideal figures who can transform, or transcend, the texture of reality. (203)

Tryan is undoubtedly the "ideal figure" of "Janet's Redemption." But in addition to the simple Romantic and idealistic presentation of the "noble sinner" and his felix culpa, there are what Thomas A. Noble calls "significantly Wordsworthian" concepts contained in several sections of "Janet's Repentance." Primary among these sections is the moment of Janet's redemption:

That walk in the dewy starlight remained for ever in Janet's memory as one of those baptismal epochs, when the soul, dipped in the sacred waters of joy and peace, rises from them with new energies, with more unalterable longings. (Ch. 25, 398)

Another example of a passage which seems to reflect Wordsworthian chiaroscuro occurs shortly after Tryan has confessed his past offenses to Janet. Her "conversion" is likened to the experience of moving from darkness to light or from blindness to sight:

A door had been opened in Janet's cold dark prison of self-despair, and the golden light of morning was pouring in its slanting beams through the blessed opening. There was sunlight in the world . . . [which] had been preparing comfort for her in the very moment when she had thought herself most forsaken.

(Ch. 21, 371)

This passage juxtaposes nicely with the first stanza of "Ode on Intimations of Immortality" in which Wordsworth describes the opposite experience of moving from light into darkness or from sight to blindness:

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore; --
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

(Lls. 1-9)

Romanticism in general and Wordsworth in particular are never very far from the consciousness of George Eliot. Long after she had moved away from Wordsworthian Pantheism and Romantic sentimentality, Eliot continued to glorify nature and to champion the supremacy of the heart in the passages of her novels; and the remarkable result which occurred was a series of novels which were at once Romantic and realistic, essential and Existential, simple and

psychological, dated and timeless. "Janet's Repentance" embodies each and all of these characteristics and, thus, represents the growth of an author through the initial stages of her development into a major writer of fiction.

* * * * *

Joan Bennett believes that some of the more inferior Romantic and Victorian writing styles necessarily influenced Eliot's early writing, and they did. However, noticeable progress took place in her development as a communicator of both her own sympathy and her personal hard line on morality, human responsibility, and selflessness during the writing of the Scenes of Clerical Life. Eliot, her characters, and her narrators all moved away from conventionally simple, episodic, and sentimental situations and into complex, sustained, and psychological circumstances, which produce more interesting plots and better rounded characters who possess highly refined perceptive/analytical powers. "Within this framework there is a scope for the narrator to comment on the action and the characters and so to expound his 'philosophy' or sense of moral values" (Bennett 100). Eliot's fiction developed rapidly into a vehicle whereby she could reveal her Doctrine of Sympathy and wherein she could present suffering humanity to a reading audience from which she hoped to elicit compassion. This was her innate tendency

as a novelist, and Joan Bennett believes that Eliot's innate tendencies have their freest expression in the earlier novels, particularly in Scenes of Clerical Life (82).

At the root of Eliot's moralism is the necessity of a significant and vital interplay between man and man and/or man and society. This explains the universal need on the part of every human being to overcome loneliness and alienation. But the fulfillment of the need presupposes society's acceptance of its responsibility to answer the call of suffering members undergoing their darkest times. Truly moral beings need somehow to control and understand and humanize the indifferent, mysterious otherness outside of themselves and to touch the needy in a gesture of becoming one and of infusing their strength into the very weakness which cries out for help. This interchange on a purely secular level--call it Eliotistic Sympathy or Sartrean Humanism--is the lifeblood of the growth of mankind as society moves away from selfishness and toward altruism; and it is about this basic Existential principle that the Clerical Scenes were written.

As each of the three Scenes was conceived, Eliot eclectically chose to deviate more and more from the patterns of the literary traditions which she knew. She moved toward more interior action and began to establish her own style based on what she believed was important to

communicate to the reading public. For example, Thomas A. Noble tells us that Gilfil, as opposed to Amos Barton, "asks for understanding rather than for pity" (75). In that same vein, the story of Tryan requires involvement with those in need. As demonstrated by Eliot's comparison of consumptive Sally's obvious physical need for help and alcoholic Janet's not so obvious psychological/emotional need, human beings must reach out to those who suffer in any way whatsoever; they must be attuned to hurts other than those which require bandages and medicine. Inherent in Noble's comparison is his recognition of Eliot's growth during and between the writing of the first two Clerical Scenes. As Eliot became more comfortable with her role as novelist, the characters became stronger and more significant as individuals. It is obvious that Milly Barton is no Janet Dempster, as Janet Dempster is no Hetty Sorel and Edgar Tryan is no Dinah Morris. But out of each character delineation comes the seed for the next, and, in this manner, the novelist and the characters she portrays become greater and more impressive.

When examining George Eliot's development as an author of fiction during the writing of the Clerical Scenes, we must include an examination of the increasing complexity of the plots themselves and the growing integration of character, plot, and setting. In "Amos Barton," little happens of significance. Amos is shown as

basically gullible and naive. He undergoes the suffering of losing his wife and leaves to go to another town. On the other hand, "Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story" presents five characters who are developed in a network of relationships out of which a more complex plot develops. At no time does any one of the "Gilfil" characters know the whole story, which the narrator makes known to the reader. The plot revolves around the characters' discovery of truth and their acceptance of it. Finally, "Janet's Repentance" presents an intricate plot which examines the motives of the main characters. The characters undergo substantial growth and change as they operate within the plot--a multifaceted story which deals with death, drunkenness, guilt, confession, repentance, and commitment, and which at all times recognizes man's freedom to change his own life and his opportunity to assist as others redirect theirs.

Despite the misfortunes of the individuals characterized in the Clerical Scenes, each of them acts as a free agent who is able to grow, change, repent, and amend at will--that is, if they desire to do so. The prevailing Determinism of the late nineteenth century, a philosophy similar to Calvinistic predestination, represented a belief which was in diametric opposition with the life of Marian Evans. She had broken out of the restrictive mold of provincial society and out of the realm of the "Lady Novelists" of her time. If any professional female of the

late 1800's can be characterized as a rebel and an iconoclast, it is George Eliot. However, her avant-garde attitude did not reject the past and the present, the expected first steps of a trail blazer. Eliot's new approach to literature can be best described as "eclectic." Because of this practice of filtering what she considered valuable out of whatever she experienced, Eliot was able to include in her novels certain aspects of both Romantic and Victorian literature. Using this same process to achieve the opposite results, she rejected the Determinism of the Naturalists. By employing these simple principles of eclecticism, Eliot unknowingly joined the ranks of her contemporary Existentialists--Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky--in her depiction of man in search of his raison d'être, aided by those more selfless than himself, operating as a free agent in an alien world. Because Eliot's writing is highly reflective of her own life and beliefs, it is reasonable to conclude that her writing is eclectic because her life was eclectic. Both had their moments of acceptance, rejection, romance, reality, theism, atheism, growth, regression, love, alienation, spirit and flesh.

It is important to note that George Eliot, the novelist, learned a great deal from Marian Evans, the person; but, in addition to this, George Eliot, the writer, also learned valuable lessons about how to express her inner person and her values through practicing her craft.

The Clerical Scenes represent the progress of a novelist who continually chose more poignant topics as her experience and ability allowed her to deal with them effectively. The first Scene is a simple study of life in provincial England, a scène de la vie de province; the last, as an outright attack on duplicity and intolerance, demonstrates considerable development on the part of Eliot in both theme and expression. Knoepfmacher tells us that the "satirical naturalist who had presented both the poet Young and Amos Barton as inferior 'animals' belonging to the 'species divine' is no longer in evidence" in "Janet's Repentance" (Early Novels 86-87). He also sees in the last of the Clerical Scenes the beginning of a "self-dialogue" between the authorial voice and the narrator "which acquired far richer overtones in the novels to follow. In a modest fashion, [Eliot] had already found a way to be artistically true to the double aims of her 'realism'" (Early Novels 87): to show the human condition as she perceived it and to convince individuals that they were capable of becoming positive contributors to its amelioration.

The Scenes of Clerical Life communicated this message as did all of her subsequent novels. Driven by the need to share this conviction with others, Eliot wrote realistically about man helping his fellows along the way--and this from one who professed not to be a moralist and

who repeatedly expressed her negative attitude toward didacticism. This belief was such a dominant factor of her personal life that it surfaced over and over in her writing. So important was the theme of the Clerical Scenes to her that ten years after their publication, she rewrote their principal message in poetry:

May I reach
That purest heaven, be to other souls
The cup of strength in some great agony,
Enkindle generous ardour, feed pure love,
Beget the smiles that have no cruelty--
Be the sweet presence of a good diffused,
And in diffusion ever more intense.
So shall I join the choir invisible
Whose music is the gladness of the world.

("The Choir Invisible" Lls. 37-45)

Chapter III

Adam Bede

There are three conditions which often look alike
Yet differ completely, flourish in the same hedgerow:
Attachment to self and to things and to persons,
detachment
From self and from things and from persons; and,
growing between them, indifference
Which resembles the others as death resembles life.

T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding"

Although Adam Bede is generally accepted as either a historical pastoral or a domestic romance, it embodies all of the philosophical, theological, and moral messages of George Eliot's later works. Her spirit of eclecticism and openness is present in every chapter of the text. Romantic descriptions of nature stand side by side with reflections on Victorian work standards, Existential evaluations of man's place in society, and philosophical narrations based on the teachings of Hegel, Comte, and Feuerbach. In addition to this, Eliot incorporated a substantial amount of Wordsworthian doctrine into both the dialogue and narration of Adam Bede. Perhaps coincidentally, perhaps not, she set the action of the story in 1799, the year between the publication of the first and the second editions of the Lyrical Ballads.

In Adam Bede the narrator is very much present; and,

for the most part, that narrator is Eliot herself. Chapter 17, entitled "In Which the Story Pauses a Little," contains a one-sided conversation between Eliot and the reader in which the novelist states that she does not create the characters in her text, she simply retells "things as they have mirrored themselves in [her] mind." She explains that

the mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed; the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you, as precisely as I can, what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box narrating my experience on oath. (Ch. 17, 221)

Eliot says that "these fellow-mortals, every one, must be accepted as they are" (Ch. 17, 222) because each has the potential of doing good and offering assistance to another. She mentions her love for the Dutch painters because of their portrayal of the truth and their sense that "things may be lovable that are not altogether handsome" (Ch. 17, 223). She warns that

in this world there are so many of these common, coarse people, who have no picturesque sentimental wretchedness! It is so needful we should remember their existence, else we may happen to leave them quite out of our religion and philosophy, and frame lofty theories which only fit a world of extremes. Therefore let Art always remind us of them. . . . There are few prophets in the world; few sublimely beautiful women; few heroes. (Ch. 17, 224)

In the same chapter, Eliot, as narrator, engages Adam in a conversation about his beliefs regarding religion and preaching. Adam expresses his simple, but profound, opinion

that "religion's something else besides doctrines and notions" (Ch. 17, 227), a principle upheld by George Eliot throughout her Evangelical, pantheistic, and secular humanistic periods.

The narrator's claim that the story was taken from experience and not fabricated is, to some extent, verified by Eliot's Journal entry dated 30 November 1858:

The germ of "Adam Bede" was an anecdote told me by my Methodist Aunt Samuel (the wife of my Father's younger brother): an anecdote from her own experience. . . . She had visited a condemned criminal, a very ignorant girl who had murdered her child and refused to confess --how she had stayed with her praying, through the night and how the poor creature at last broke out into tears, and confessed her crime. My Aunt afterwards went with her in the cart to the place of execution, and she described to me the great respect with which this ministry of hers was regarded by the official people about the gaol. (Letters 2: 502)

The Journal entry continues by acknowledging that "the character of Dinah grew out of [her] recollections of [her] aunt" (502) and that "the character of Adam, and one or two incidents connected with him were suggested by [her] Father's early life" (503).⁶ "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" decried authors' writing about subjects unfamiliar to them; Scenes of Clerical Life was evidence that Eliot intended to follow her own guidelines in this matter; and Adam Bede confirms Eliot's dedication to the production of realistic fiction that is drawn from life through either personal or vicarious experience. Calvin Bedient recognizes Adam Bede as a "glowing celebration of a former England, the overflow of a countrywoman's intimate

knowledge" (34) of the people, the environs, and the mores. The novel contains "the solid presence of a recognizably real world" which is virtually a "symphony in colours and textures" (Jones 7).

Among many other things, Adam Bede is the novel of realism which George Eliot, the narrator, tried to convince the reader it was. In my opinion, Adam Bede is the novelistic fulfillment of Eliot's essay "The Natural History of German Life" in which she states that sociology does not happen based on "economical science" and that relationships cannot be "settled by algebraic equations." She writes that "real knowledge of the people" is often developed by the "keepers, artisans, and peasantry," and that, basically, books should deal with the real people in order to get at the truth of what society is all about (272). As she develops the essay, Eliot points out that these peasants are often very subjective and short-sighted and that they have no sense of the "universal rights of man" (283). The inhabitants of Hayslope are indeed those developers of sociology who work at creating and maintaining relationships and who are extremely subjective, unconscious of the big picture, and unaware of any concern about man's place in the universe. They go about their daily lives stumbling, perhaps learning from their own mistakes, giving in to and trying to overcome their prejudices, and contributing to the vitality of the place

by their work and their interpersonal exchanges.

At the root of the reality of Hayslope, however, is the central tragedy of Hetty Sorel, which is intimately connected with the town's existence. Joan Bennett states that as "we come to know all grades of its society, artisans, labourers, farmers, rector, schoolmaster, innkeeper, squire," we come to realize that the very "life of Hayslope envelops the tragedy" (79), that all of its citizens somehow participate in the series of tragic events. "The cultured benignity of the rector, the moral enthusiasm of the Methodists, the simple ignorance of the country-folk, all make their own impact on the central characters and help to determine the events" (80) which occur. Moreover, Felicia Bonaparte views the totality of Eliot's works as tragedy. She writes:

My own conviction is that Eliot's novels are tragedies and that as such they may require an explanation but not an apology. . . . Indeed, [tragedy] binds together all of Eliot's novels, and as the unifying theme of Balzac's novels is suggested in their common title "The Human Comedy," Eliot's novels might well be called "The Human Tragedy." (xi)

There is a fine line between tragedy and melodrama. As Eliot developed her literary skills by writing novels, the melodrama of Millie Barton's deathbed scene and of Caterina Sarti's near-murder of Captain Wybrow became the tragedy of Hetty Sorel--her frustrating and fruitless odyssey, her agonizing dilemma, and her final painful end. Barbara Hardy believes that "George Eliot's tragic characters are not so

strikingly different from Shakespeare's. The truly unheroic tragic figure is there . . . to universalize the theme, rather than to carry its whole burden" (Novels 16), as in the case of Hetty Sorel, whose existence communicates the thematic ideas of the "irrevocability of the past" and "the nemesis that lies in wrong doing" (Paris, Experiments 153).

Endemic to all of the novels of George Eliot--and Adam Bede is no exception--is a heavy dose of morality. But what does Eliot mean by "morality"? For her, the moral act is one which is performed with the betterment of society in mind. The existence of morality depends absolutely on the presence of positive actions which contribute to the development of oneself and of other individuals. By these standards, Dinah Morris is the most moral character in the novel, and until recently, Adam was also generally viewed as thoroughly good and totally moral. For example, Henry James wrote:

My chief complaint with Adam Bede himself is that he is too good. He is meant . . . to be every inch a man; but . . . there are several inches wanting. He lacks spontaneity and sensibility . . . [and] that supreme quality without which a man can never be interesting to men, -- the capacity to be tempted. ("Novels" 5)

However, according to Bernard J. Paris, "recent critics have seen that Adam is not a flawless, static figure; the novel is, in fact, the story of his education" (150), that is, the story of his moral development.

Adam Bede's moral growth--like the Positivistic world of Auguste Comte which it reflects and the

Existentialistic world of Jean-Paul Sartre which it anticipates--occurs in three stages. At first, Adam is an egoist, "not one of George Eliot's blind, self-seeking egoists" (Paris, Experiments 150), but nonetheless, an egoist. He resents his father, directs his own life to suit himself, thinks subjectively, deals with others using rash severity, and fully expects his friends to perform according to the personal guidelines which his judgment deems acceptable for them. He is self-righteous, high-handed, and condescending. Only through suffering does Adam Bede move to the second stage of moral development, that of becoming aware of the "otherness" of fellow human beings. Paris describes this stage as that moment when "the egoist is wakened from his self-indulgent dreams to the harsh reality of life." It is the time when the subjective individual "is taken out of his private world and enters the world of his fellow men, who are also fellow sufferers" (Experiments, 133). When Adam reaches this plateau, he is actually able to empathize with and to forgive Hetty. Somehow, because of his own suffering, Adam learns to appreciate hers. The narrator tells us that "deep, unspeakable suffering may well be called a baptism, a regeneration, the intitation into a new state" (Ch. 42, 471). But, at the time of his growth to the second level, Adam has still not reached the fullness of moral development wherein he can appreciate the pain of Arthur

Donnithorne.

Adam, who has "learned to dread the violence of his feelings" (Ch. 48, 509), at first refuses to see Arthur. Then, through a series of exchanges with Bartle Massey, Adam finally reaches the final stage of moral growth--identification with the other as other--and agrees to speak with his life-long friend. During the exchange, Adam "looked at Arthur with mournful affection" and resolves to stay on at Hayslope to do his work and "make the world a bit better place for them as can enjoy it." After a hand-clasp, Adam leaves, "feeling that sorrow [is] more bearable now [that] hatred [is] gone" (Ch. 48, 516). Paris's evaluation of Adam's growth is simple and succinct. He writes that "at the end of the novel Adam is much more fully a member of the human community than he had been at the beginning" (Experiments 155). In addition to this, Paris attributes Adam's eventual love for Dinah Morris to his growth toward "new and higher sensibilities" (Experiments 156).

The progress of Arthur Donnithorne's moral development is not as subtle as that of Adam Bede. Arthur has generally been viewed by critics as the "villain," and recent study has not changed that position. However, Arthur is not a "total" egoist, equal to a character like Anthony Wybrow. Arthur at least undergoes interior struggles over his attraction to Hetty Sorel, whereas

Wybrow simply enjoys and flaunts his dalliance. Arthur sometimes actually feels the torment of conscience--an experience which seems to be missing from the life of Wybrow. Although Arthur's consciousness of his inner warning voice does not make his deed any less evil, it does render him less a villain. When Arthur realizes what havoc he had created for Hetty Sorel, he returns to claim his portion of the guilt, to express his sorrow, and to do what little he can to alleviate her situation. Because of his selfish deeds, Arthur is never able to realize his dream of functioning as the great land owner in Hayslope. For years, he is left to wander the earth with his regiment, calling no place home. Despite the fact that Donald D. Stone believes that "because Arthur is capable of feeling and affection, he is capable of suffering and therefore reforming" (208), it is still doubtful that Arthur has the inner strength to practice altruism and spend his life raising others out of their suffering as Edgar Tryan did. However, whether Arthur ever reaches the final stage of moral development--that of contributing positively to humankind--is left to the imagination of the reader. His return in the Epilogue offers little promise that he can, in fact, rise to the moral level of Adam and Dinah.

Although Adam Bede was one of the earlier works, at the time of its creation Eliot's novelistic skills had developed far beyond those evident in "Amos Barton." What

was actually happening to her growth can be demonstrated by examining two concepts: 1) she was fast becoming more comfortable with communicating depth of emotion and internal conflict; and 2) her penchant for eclecticism--although always present and, indeed, the backbone of her universal appeal--became less and less obvious as she learned to integrate character, setting, action, philosophy, morality, and literary style. It is because of this ability to integrate that Eliot could present morality without being moralistic and teach without being didactic. David Daiches recognizes this mastery of integration when he writes that "in all her fiction, George Eliot was concerned with moral problems of character, but she never abstracted her characters from their environment in order to illustrate their moral dilemmas" (73). He acclaims her unique "moral vision" and states that "if it has become less unusual since [her time], this is because George Eliot by her achievement in fiction permanently enlarged the scope of the novel" (76).

A significant factor in Eliot's "enlarg[ing] the scope of the novel," of course, was her probing of the interior person--and even of the unconscious. As mentioned earlier, Lawrence and James both acknowledged her as their precursor in this area. Because hers was an initial attempt, George Eliot's exposition of the inner lives of her characters did not, at least in her early fiction,

reach a high level of self-consciousness. Jacob Korg's observations indicate that Eliot relied heavily on the narrator for the exposition of the interior states of her characters. He objects to the fact that the characters themselves do not seem to be nearly as aware of their own inner judgments and rational activities as are the narrators. Korg states that "the minds of George Eliot's people are orderly when considered in the abstract, but not 'well-regulated' because the laws of their operation that are visible to the narrator are concealed from the thinkers themselves." He continues to explain Eliot's use of the narrator as psychiatrist rather than that of the character as conscious self-examiner when he observes that Eliot "employs omniscience to illuminate those parts of a character's mind and motives that we would call unconscious" (86).

The truth of Korg's rationale is easily illustrated by looking at the psyche of Adam Bede. Throughout the text, Adam remains unaware of his own initiation into the Feuerbachian I-Thou world and of the drastic changes which are occurring within his person because of his newly acquired capacity for empathy and forgiveness; but although he does not engage in a "stream of consciousness" which exposes his own realization of the value shifting which has taken place within him as a result of his participation in the Hetty-Arthur ordeal, Adam does make some profound

philosophical judgments toward the end of the novel-- judgments of which he is certainly incapable at its outset. One such judgment occurs when he approaches Dinah with his proposal of marriage and encounters her fear that loving him would put her in a position in which she would "forget the Divine presence, and seek no love but [Adam's]" (Ch. 52, 552). His response is an argument which reflects his new and highly developed sense of "the other":

"I'll never be the man t' urge you against your conscience. But . . . I don't believe your loving me could shut up your heart; it's only adding to what you've been before, not taking away from it; for it seems to me it's the same with love and happiness as with sorrow--the more we know of it the better we can feel what other people's lives are or might be, and so we shall only be more tender to 'em, and wishful to help 'em." (Ch. 52, 553)

Adam has grown. We are shown how his interior person has developed. We know that it is probably because of his new heights of participation in the human experience that he becomes attracted to the altruistic Dinah. Eliot exposes the inner life of Adam for the reader, but, as Korg would be quick to point out, she does not expose it to Adam himself. Although we are never told that Adam does not realize the growth he has undergone, the narrator does give us sufficient information to insure our discovering Adam's un-selfconsciousness for ourselves. Regarding Adam's attraction to Dinah, the narrator relates that

[Adam] was amazed at the way in which this new thought of Dinah's love had taken possession of him, with an overmastering power that made all other feelings give

way before the impetuous desire to know that the thought was true. Strange, that till that moment the possibility of their ever being lovers had never crossed his mind, and yet now, all his longing suddenly went out towards that possibility. (Ch. 51, 546)

These insights into the inner lives of the characters--whether they come from the narrator or from the characters themselves--indicate a vision which is, in essence, modern. Although Jerome Thale does not go so far as to acknowledge Eliot to be more modern than Victorian, he does concede that "[Eliot's] vision . . . seems as much modern as Victorian. Not that she seems modern in a way that Hemingway, Huxley, Lawrence do, but she does not seem as distinctly Victorian as Thackeray or Charlotte Brontë." He designates the contents of her novels as "congenial to [the modern writer's] sense of the world: the studies of disenchantment, the psychological analysis, the seriousness with which she took her art" (9).

Thale proclaimed George Eliot "as much modern as Victorian"; and although Eliot was not typical of Victorian novelists, she was indeed one of them. Eliot never entered into the mid-nineteenth century literary tendency to decry the lot of the working classes and expose the physically squalid conditions of the poor. She was not squeamish about profanity and sex, nor did she maintain the front of false modesty, empty manners, and rigidity common to Victorian writers of fiction. However, because her own intellectual life had developed through doubting the

religious, philosophical, and social status quo. several chapters in her novels deal with typically Victorian questions relating to the role of authority and the problems arising from the existence of class systems. In addition to this, vocation was a dominating factor in the Eliot novels as it was in the life of their creator and in the novels of the period. Actually, the central action of Adam Bede relies heavily upon the mid-nineteenth century concern regarding authority, classes, and work.

For the Victorians, authority was recognized in three types of leaders--political, religious, and economic. Basic to the setting of Adam Bede is the name Donnithorne. It represents an "ancient family" (Ch. 2, 58) in Hayslope, a hub around which all of its people and their activities operate. The Donnithornes have titles like "captain" and "lord," and they sponsor gatherings which the entire town anticipates and to which everyone comes to commemorate events like Captain Arthur's twenty-first birthday. The authority of the Donnithorne family appears to be beyond question--at least until the young heir becomes sexually involved with a dairy maid and brings about a resultant series of tragedies from which there appears to be no escape. Also present in the tale of Hayslope is the representative of the Church of England, the Reverend Adolphus Irwine. He functions as an authority figure of sorts; however, the most significant decisions he makes

during the story pertains to his chess games rather than to the needs of his vicarage.

Part of George Eliot's Victorian penchant is exemplified in her exposure of these traditional authority figures as not worthy of their titles. Donnithorne, born into a rich and influential family, blessed with all of the advantages that money and breeding can afford him, and given absolute respect by both his friends and the townspeople, falls from his lofty position--as symbolized by his fall when he fights with Adam--and earns the scorn of his most trusting devotee, Adam Bede. Because Adam feels betrayed by Arthur Donnithorne, he expresses his anger and disappointment to the Reverend Mr. Irwine by condemning the young man whom he has emulated throughout his life.

'It's his doing,' he said; 'if there's been any crime, it's at his door, not at hers. He taught her to deceive--he deceived me first. Let 'em put him on his trial--let him stand in court beside her, and I'll tell 'em how he got hold of her heart, and 'ticed her t' evil, and then lied to me. Is he to go free, while they lay all the punishment on her . . . so weak and young?' (Ch. 39, 455)

This speech of Adam's is in direct contrast with Mr. Irwine's toast to Arthur at the young Squire's birthday celebration: "We've niver known anything on you but what was good an' honourable." In addition to this fall of Arthur from grace, Irwine who "cared a great deal for the good-will of [the] people" (Ch. 24, 309), sadly realizes, after listening to Adam's condemnation of Arthur, that he should have been more receptive and pastorly toward Arthur

when the young Squire came to his home obviously needing to confide in someone. The narrator tells us that

it was a bitter remembrance to him now--that morning when Arthur breakfasted with him, and seemed as if he were on the verge of a confession. It was plain enough now what he had wanted to confess. And if their words had taken another turn . . . if he himself had been less fastidious about intruding on another man's secrets . . . it was cruel to think how thin a film had shut out rescue from all this guilt and misery.

(Ch. 39, 453)

Throughout the text of Adam Bede, Eliot effectively demonstrated that nobility and grace are present among the common people and that neither the secular nor the church leaders in Hayslope are worthy of the authority which their positions have bestowed upon them.

Relevant to this point, Eliot glorified the working class and exposed the value of its contributions toward society. The message is clear: no longer does the rural community need to accept, without question, the authority of its landlords and pastors--certainly not when the proletariat is producing strong altruistic individuals like Adam and Dinah. Not only do these simple people show qualities of leadership and good judgment, but they also exhibit empathy and selflessness--qualities very desirable in leaders and landlords. Primarily, these characteristics become evident in Adam, Dinah, and in several of the other members of the working class, through their attitudes toward their work and their daily dealings with their peers. Victorians, including George Eliot, were

very prone to evaluate individuals by examining their work. They judged people by what they did and by how they did it. Adam has chosen a noble trade, but what makes his choice even more praiseworthy is the meticulous care he takes to produce a perfect piece of carpentry. The narrator tells us that "to make a good job of anything, however small, was always a pleasure to Adam" (Ch. 27, 340). Coming from the pen of George Eliot, that was high praise.

Alan Mintz believes that George Eliot saw professional work as "a significant means of self-realization and of contributing to the progress of humankind" (6). He believes that her novels "are preoccupied with the question of work, especially in its relation to the middle classes." His explanation for her being different from her Victorian peers is "her refusal either to delight in or to deplore the changed nature of work in the nineteenth century" and her determination "instead to assess its human possibilities" (2). Adam Bede communicates Eliot's own emphasis on the importance of individual dedication to the production of high-quality work. The text embodies Eliot's conviction that "the professions . . . provided a means of combining the exigencies of livelihood with the pursuit of individual idealism" (Mintz 15)--a principle which both Adam and Dinah exemplify.

Mintz's use of the word "idealism" indicates his

understanding of the philosophy of George Eliot. His explanation does what Eliot's life did; it interrelates idealism with the mundane concern of earning a living. Although Mintz never refers to Eliot's "patchwork" philosophy, which I am calling eclecticism, this juxtaposition of terms indicates that he was aware of it. Idealism is generally associated with the Romantics, and Eliot, as has been previously stated, retained many ties with the Romantic era in literature. Much of her Romantic penchant, of course, derived from her devotion to both William Wordsworth and Sir Walter Scott. In addition to these favorites retained from her childhood came the later influence of Goethe. Donald D. Stone notes that

as Eliot was the wife of Goethe's English biographer, her high regard for Goethe is hardly surprising. At least one reviewer of Adam Bede noted the resemblance between Gretchen in Faust and Hetty Sorrel, not only in Hetty's fate but in the borrowing of the scene in which she decks herself with the jewels her lover has given her. (186)

Hetty Sorel is undoubtedly a Romantic character--in the same sense that Emma Bovary is a Romantic character. In each case, Romantic idealism leads to a hard dose of reality after which only tragedy remains. Stone evaluates Hetty's Romantic attitudes as "Eliot's overzealous attempt to make Hetty appear the one alien figure in the novel--the single character denied the power to feel and hence the only person capable of committing a crime." He also wonders whether or not the reader is more sympathetic with Hetty's

"amoral willfulness" than with "Adam and Dinah's Wordsworthian submissiveness" and whether Hetty must come to her terrible end because she deserves it or because "there is no room for [her] in a pastoral idyll built out of romantic wish-fulfillment" (208). Here Stone seems somewhat harsh in his evaluation of Eliot's treatment of Miss Sorel. I believe that Hetty should be considered a victim of the society which punished willful and unconventional females--the same kind of a society which criticized and, in some cases, rejected the author herself. It is true that George Eliot portrays Hetty as selfish and guilty of a crime, but to label Miss Sorel as an "alien figure," in the sense in which Stone seems to use the term, somehow does not concur with the novelist's sympathetic treatment of those who, like Janet Dempster, are in need of human compassion.

At the beginning of the novel, Adam Bede himself is presented as a Romantic. He idealistically believes that both Hetty and Arthur are the people whom he wants them to be, and it is only through painful encounters with reality that he accepts the unreality of what he has previously believed to be true. What Adam undergoes is not exactly a death of idealism; it is rather a process, in which, according to Calvin Bedient, "the ideal is . . . very gently diffused through the stuff of reality, diluting but not decomposing it" (69). Whatever happens to idealism

during the course of the novel, it remains present at the conclusion of the text--although it then exists in an altered, perhaps a tempered, state.

Throughout the course of Adam Bede, Eliot allowed herself Wordsworthian passages in her descriptions of nature. She virtually painted--and enchanted--the woods in which Arthur's hermitage stood:

It was a wood of beeches and limes, with here and there a light, silver-stemmed birch--just the sort of wood most haunted by the nymphs; you see their white sunlit limbs gleaming athwart the boughs, or peeping from behind the smooth-sweeping outline of a tall lime; you hear their soft liquid laughter--but if you look with a too curious sacrilegious eye, they vanish behind the silvery beeches, they make you believe that their voice was only a running brooklet, perhaps they metamorphose themselves into a tawny squirrel that scampers away and mocks you from the topmost bough. (Ch. 12, 175)

Stone's explanation for Eliot's use of passages of this type is her having been "swayed" (183) by Wordsworth and "immersed in the Romantic tradition" (201), and this evaluation is undoubtedly correct. This immersion of hers in Romanticism makes itself felt not only in her descriptions of nature, but more importantly in her reliance on the supremacy of feelings and the reliability of sensations. Adam, when spoken to in his old age by the narrator, communicates his belief that "it isn't notions sets people doing the right thing--it's feelings" (Ch. 17, 226). He continues by explaining that "there's things go on in the soul, and times when feelings come into you like a rushing mighty wind . . . so as you look back on yourself

as if you was somebody else" (Ch. 17, 227). To Adam, feelings are a guide to action, a measuring rod for sensitive response. In general, according to Thomas Pinney, "at the heart of each of George Eliot's novels lies the conviction that the basis of morality, and hence the vital principle of all that is good in life, is strength of feeling" (41).

Inherent in this mix of morality, feeling, compassion, dedication to work, and belief in a prevailing goodness is the Existentialistic principle that although man invariably suffers because of loneliness and alienation from his fellows, he can, through his personal efforts to develop a sense of the other, participate in the human community and, in fact, contribute in a positive way to its growth. Bedient believes that "the fundamental theme of George Eliot's fiction is the necessity of dying unto the self" (45), a concept which reflects both the Existentialist and the Positivist notion of moving from a subjective to an objective existence. It is because of this kind of motion in his life that Adam is able to work out his own essence. At the outset of the novel, the name "Adam" is simply synonymous with "carpenter." However, by the time the book is over, "Adam" has grown to mean "fully developed member of the human race"; Adam has indeed worked out his own essence, given himself a purpose, established himself as a man of responsibility--even in the Sartrian

sense. As Jean-Paul Sartre explains:

when a man commits himself to anything, fully realizing that he is not only choosing what he will be, but is thereby at the same time a legislator deciding for the whole of mankind--in such a moment a man cannot escape from the sense of complete and profound responsibility.
(292)

By the end of the novel, Adam has completed what Paris calls his education. Having arrived at the third stage of moral development, having achieved his own essence, and having developed into an objective and altruistic individual, Adam selects for his life-partner a woman who reflects all that he has come to stand for. His maturity has been achieved through a series of free choices by which he responds to both the positive stimuli given him by his counselors and the negative experiences encountered during his "trials." At no time does the factor of Determinism come into play; for all of his difficulties, Adam is, distinctly and at all times, a free agent.

Symbolic of Adam's freedom to mold himself into the essential being of his choice is, of course, his profession. Adam is a maker, a shaper, a molder of raw material. We cannot forget that Charles Baudelaire was a contemporary of George Eliot. During the entire span of her novel-writing period, Symbolism was a recognized literary movement. It is not surprising that evidence of Symbolism exists in Adam Bede--the product of the woman whom we are presenting as a literary eclectic. Symbolism is an effective means of presenting the essence of a thing;

and, aside from this, it lends itself to the kind of literary tour de force which would naturally appeal to one who strove to be an exceptional writer. Why mention Arthur Donnithorne's owning his own copy of the Lyrical Ballads except to allow that to symbolize his self-image as Romantic hero? Arthur makes specific reference to "The Ancient Mariner" of which he "can hardly make head or tail" (Ch. 5, 109); little does he know that he too, symbolically, will bear an albatross about his neck throughout the remainder of his life.

The most obvious example of Symbolism in Adam Bede is the chapter entitled "The Two Bed-Chambers" in which the solitary habits of Hetty Sorel and Dinah Morris are presented so that the reader can compare the two. The narrator sarcastically explains that "devout worshippers never allow inconveniences to prevent them from performing their religious rites." Here, the reader expects some reference to Dinah's evening prayers, but the voice continues by explaining that "Hetty this evening was more bent on her peculiar form of worship than usual" (Ch. 15, 195). We are then shown that Hetty worships herself--standing before her mirror. She primps and fusses and indulges in her Romantic notions that Arthur "would want to marry her, and make a lady of her" (Ch. 15, 196). At the same time, in another room in the Poyser's home, Dinah performs her "religious rites"; she sits before her bedroom

window and rejoices in the view of the hedgerow elms, the pasture, the meadow, and the fields.

She closed her eyes, that she might feel more intensely the presence of a Love and Sympathy deeper and more tender than was breathed from the earth and sky. That was often Dinah's mode of praying in solitude. Simply to close her eyes, and to feel herself enclosed by the Divine Presence. (Ch. 15, 202)

Eliot's juxtaposition of Hetty gazing into a mirror with Dinah looking out at the world not only symbolizes self-love and unselfish love, it further represents Eliot's philosophical conviction regarding selfishness and altruism, what Sartre calls subjectivity and objectivity. The glass of the mirror and the glass of the window and the properties of each brilliantly represent the essence of the personality of each woman.

In addition to using Symbolism as a means of exposing the inner personalities of her main characters, George Eliot consciously employed dialect and dialogue to convey information to the reader about her secondary characters. For Eliot, dialect served several purposes. First of all, it labeled an individual as coming from a specific place; secondly, it indicated the character's level of education and sophistication; and thirdly, dialect solidified the truth of her realism and conveyed her knowledge of the area and the people about whom she wrote. In a letter to Walter William Skeat, who was collecting material for his English Dialect Dictionary in 1872, Eliot discussed one of these purposes. She wrote:

It must be borne in mind that my inclination to be as close as I could to the rendering of dialect, both in words and spelling, was constantly checked by the artistic duty of being generally intelligible. But for that check, I should have given a stronger colour to the dialogue in "Adam Bede," which is modelled on the talk of N. Staffordshire and the neighbouring part of Derbyshire. (Letters 9: 39)

Eliot's peasants, of course, speak with more dialectal variations from standard English than do her aristocrats and clergymen. In addition to these somewhat obvious observations regarding the use of dialect, R. T. Jones points out a few more subtle indications of character that expose Eliot's sociological appraisals of the stuff of which her less cultured, simpler characters were made. Jones begins by quoting a passage spoken in the text by Adam's peasant mother, Lisbeth Bede, after Adam announces that because of the shame his father's drunkenness has caused him, he would like to leave home and work in a distant place:

'Nay, my lad, my lad, thee wouldstna go away an' break thy mother's heeart, an' leave thy feyther to ruin. Thee wouldstna na' 'em carry me to th' churchyard, an' thee not to follow me. I shanna rest i' my grave if I donna see thee at th' last. . . . Thee mun forgie thy feyther--thee munna be so bitter again' him. He was a good feyther to thee . . . when thee wast a baby at the breast.' (Ch. 4, 85)

Jones indicates that Lisbeth's speech represents all of the things that are important to her. He believes that these words of hers inform the reader that Adam's mother is a

peasant, with little to distract the mind from the primal facts of birth, change and death; more precisely, the world of the peasant woman, for whom the

tragic realities are more insistently present than for the man--who has his work as a link with a world outside. (9)

He credits George Eliot with far greater powers of character analysis through dialect and dialogue than are obvious to the casual--and even to the careful--reader. However, he places greater emphasis on Eliot's "imaginative creation of . . . patterns of thought" as reflected in the subject matter and rationale contained in her dialogues than on her "imitation of dialect" for thorough and accurate "sense of the quality of Lisbeth Bede's life, and of the world she inhabits" (9).

Eliot's familiarity with probing the inner person of peasant and aristocrat, of the satisfied and the suffering, indicates her knowledge of the psyche and her preoccupation with how the intellectual, emotional, and physical levels of being contribute to the composition of the total person. Eliot's presentation of Hetty goes far beyond a study of her wrongdoing or innocence. Jones believes that "George Eliot enters into Hetty's agony with an intensity that leaves considerations of guilt or folly far behind." He sees the chapters which deal with Hetty Sorel as a significant "creative achievement" in their "steadiness" and their "undeviating concern" with her terrible experience (18). Because of her philosophical acceptance of the Doctrine of Sympathy and her insistence on man's need for support from his fellows, Eliot dramatically

portrays Hetty as driven to the verge of taking her own life as a result of her having no support factor in her existence. According to Bernard J. Paris, Hetty feels "the despair of moral isolation and alienation from the world" because of her "loss of ties with a communal group" (Experiments 141). Her loss of Hayslope, her failure to find either Arthur or Dinah, and her lack of personal resources upon which to draw render her a victim of a fear which is too great for her morally underdeveloped spirit to overcome.

Adam Bede contains all of the varied interests of its author. Because of this, it anticipates her later novels. Although it does not have the psychological insights of The Mill on the Floss or the sociological depth of Middlemarch, Adam Bede contains the seeds from which the later--and probably greater--novels developed. Eliot is noted for her Romantic imagination; she is remembered primarily as a Victorian novelist; she has been praised by her peers and by her followers for her knowledge of philosophy, theology, foreign languages, and literature; she has been given the titles of translator, poet, essayist, critic, and novelist; she has been recognized for anticipating modern literature. It is my opinion that she drew upon all of this background when writing Adam Bede. It seems that each generation of critics finds higher praise for the integrity of the text and for the subtlety

of its meaning. The eclectic spirit of the author has made this increasing critical appreciation possible.

Chapter IV

The Mill on the Floss

Our brown canal was endless to my thought;
And on its banks I sat in dreamy peace,
Unknowing how the good I loved was wrought,
Untroubled by the fear that it would cease.

George Eliot, "Brother and Sister"

Several nineteenth-century British novels follow the pattern established by Goethe's Bildungsroman. Such is the case with Dickens's David Copperfield, Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre, Jane Austen's Mansfield Park, and Thackeray's Pendennis. All depict the development of a child through his adolescence and into adulthood. In each of these texts, the individual matures through meeting and overcoming challenges until he achieves a happy outcome. The pattern is similar in each case: that is, the young person undergoes many tests during a time when life seems totally against him; but in the end, he conquers the odds and makes a success of himself. Although the beginning and middle of George Eliot's Mill on the Floss seem to follow the pattern of these models, its tragic ending separates her novel from these pre-existing examples of that familiar genre. Indeed throughout the work, there exists a sense of foreboding and a depth of isolation about the person of Maggie Tulliver which prepares the reader for an

ending that departs drastically from the traditional "happily ever after."

The Mill on the Floss is Eliot's most tragic and most obviously autobiographical novel. In addition to this, The Mill is a deeply psychological work which anticipates the Freudian era. In her spirit of eclecticism, Eliot blends Wordsworthian description, sociological commentary, and Existentialist principles with classical elements of tragedy and twentieth-century psychoanalysis to present this semi-autobiographical study of the soul of a misfit. As always, Eliot incorporates into the novel moral, ethical and religious ideals and presents her characters as either bogged down in or growing up through the three stages of human development.

Two of the elemental devices upon which the plot turns are suffering and tragedy. Mill contains several passages which reflect on the "bitter sorrows of childhood" (Bk. I, Ch. 5, 43), and at one point, the narrator admonishes both himself and the reader by warning: "Surely if we could recall that early bitterness and the dim guesses, the strangely perspectiveless conception of life that gave the bitterness its intensity, we should not pooh-pooh the griefs of our children" (Bk. I, Ch. 7, 74). Throughout the text, the narrator seems to be telling us that not only do children suffer a great deal, but child-pain is often the seed of adult tragedy. And so it is in

the case of Maggie Tulliver. Traditionally, tragedy occurs when a good and well-meaning person is brought down to a miserable situation or to death because external forces either reject, persecute, or cast away both the individual and his good intentions. Maggie is just such a tragic figure. Although she does not enjoy the stature of an Antigone, the Greek heroine whom Ruby Redinger believes that George Eliot saw as her own "classic counterpart" (315), Maggie maintains the same strong stand against her family and townspeople regarding her own rebellious convictions. Redinger sees Creon as representative of Isaac Evans in the classic struggle between conservatism and change, the role played by Tom Tulliver in The Mill. Eliot herself wrote in her essay on "Antigone and Its Moral" that "the struggle between Antigone and Creon represents that struggle between elemental tendencies and established laws by which the outer life of man is gradually and painfully being brought into harmony with his inward needs" and that "until this harmony is perfected, we shall never be able to attain a great right without also doing a wrong" (264).

Maggie is indeed wronged--by society, by her family, by Stephen Guest, and most of all, by her brother; and this series of wrongs brings her to her tragic end. These wrongs "[freeze] Maggie Tulliver into the posture of noble sacrifice" and make a martyr of her (Stone 225).

Perhaps the terms "martyr" and "tragedy" seem too heavy to describe a novel about a willful little girl, but what is a martyr if not a person who dies for her beliefs and what is more tragic than the death of an innocent? Walter Allen explains that

Maggie's tragedy is that of the free spirit caught in a blankly materialistic world. It is a world ruled over entirely by the sense of property, by self-regard and by pride in family; but family itself is valued more as a vehicle for the preservation and transmission of property than for any other reason. (57)

So we accept the fact that George Eliot managed to convey tragedy in The Mill on the Floss, a type of tragedy which Ian Adam believes was heavily influenced by the "classical Greek tragedians" who, he says, taught her the "tragic form she was to adapt for the novel" (GE 4-5).

Much of the sense of tragedy that is incorporated into The Mill on the Floss is believed to spring from the intensity of emotion with which it was written. Mill is generally accepted as the most autobiographical of Eliot's novels; Ruby Redinger refers to it as one of the "most obvious re-creations of [George Eliot's] childhood" (31). As a growing girl, Marian Evans felt a great attachment to her brother, Isaac. His approval and companionship were extremely important to her. Gordon Haight refers to Marian's love for Isaac as the "dominating passion" of her youth. He explains that the "Brother and Sister" sonnets "recall how she followed him about everywhere" and rejoiced in his every attention to her (Biography 5). What Eliot

did, to a great extent, in The Mill on the Floss was to recreate Isaac and Marian Evans in the fictional characters of Tom and Maggie Tulliver. After Marian Evans became the live-in companion of George Henry Lewes, her much-loved brother refused to have anything to do with her. This rift was probably the greatest sorrow of Ms. Evans's life. However, Redinger believes that there was a positive side to the suffering which this separation caused for the novelist. She explains that

if Isaac had remained in her life, George Eliot could not have written The Mill on the Floss. She never would have been free of the inhibiting awareness of his constant disapproval and the attendant, uneasy doubt that she alone was to blame for the deep trouble between them. Negative as it was in itself, Isaac's deliberate shutting himself off from her may have been the final step needed to liberate the full force of her creative power. (345)

This, of course, is critical conjecture, but Redinger's opinion seems to be supported by the level of dramatic intensity which Mill projects--perhaps the result of Eliot's pain as she recalled the youthful closeness juxtaposed against the reality of adult distance.

Joan Bennett views this "new element" of autobiography as the source of "the greater strength and the greater weakness of this novel." Although there are autobiographical elements in all of the Eliot novels, a fact supported over and over in the novelist's letters, Bennett believes that "George Eliot is identified with Maggie Tulliver in a different way and to a different

degree" than any other character is identified with either Eliot or her family members in her other works (115). The strength of this situation is, of course, the depth of feeling which is communicated by an author who is intimately involved in the relationship she is portraying. Gordon Haight states that "the need of being loved would always subdue [George Eliot], as it did Maggie Tulliver" (Biography 145), and this need is the emotion around which the entire plot of Mill on the Floss turns.

The child Maggie Tulliver seeks refuge from the depressing world of Victorian provincialism by retreating into her own imaginative world, a world of "Books and Waking Dreams" (Bk. IV, Ch. 2, 290). Of her own childhood tendency to withdraw into the realm of unreality, Eliot wrote in a letter to Maria Lewis: "When I was quite a little child I could not be satisfied with the things around me; I was constantly living in a world of my own creation" (Letters 1: 22). Both the real and the fictional little girls shared a love for the imaginative world and the companionship of their older brothers, a need for affection and approval, and a passion for reading and individuality. John P. Bushnell likens Miss Evans to Miss Tulliver because both "must contend with attempted imposed repression" and because each was constantly forced to fight against the efforts expended by those who would mold her into a "conventional woman in a convention-ridden

world" (393). Certainly these similarities are insufficient to categorize Mill as the life of the youthful Marian Evans, but because the likeness is so strong, we can, with Barbara Hardy, call Mill on the Floss a novel "loosely classed as autobiographical" ("Mill" 42).

This "living in a world of [her] own creation," which George Eliot did in her youth, enabled her to portray a vivid world of "Waking Dreams" into which the unhappy Maggie Tulliver could retreat when reality became either too stark or too threatening. As stated earlier, George Eliot's work anticipated the modern novel primarily because of its heavy emphasis on the interior life of its fictional characters. In his work, The Novel and the Modern World, David Daiches explains that "virtually all eighteenth- and nineteenth-century" novels reflected authors who acted essentially as observers. "Anything significant in [their] characters' behavior was at once indicated by a publicly observable movement toward some shift in status or fortune" (2). Of course, this is true. However, Eliot's Mill communicates with the reader on the inner workings of Maggie's consciousness--a reality far from "publicly observable."

Daiches describes the modern novel as containing "the presence in the given consciousness of all it had ever experienced and perhaps also of all that the race had experienced" (Novel 7), a characteristic which calls to

mind the hours Maggie passes in the attic remembering the past, reading authors long dead, and futilely attempting to reconcile her conscious experiences with the hostile environment of her present family and social circumstances. The modern novel, as opposed to the novels of earlier times, generally contains more fully developed characters who are viewed both from within and from without; it often juxtaposes time and place and shifts from one point of view to another. In addition to this, most first-rate modern novels deal with man's psyche--his sexual fears and desires, his real and imagined threats from the well- or ill-intended acts of others, and his conscious and often agonizing search for who he is, where he fits, and what he ought to do. Above all, the modern novel is experimental. It does things which others have not done, treats subjects which others have left untreated, and presents data in ways which others have not attempted. The modern novel looks for something new to say--and for a new way to say it. Eliot's Mill on the Floss not only departs from the subject matter, the manner of presentation, and the narrative stance of the previous and contemporary novels of other writers, it begins a new phase within her own publication history. Mill exposes the inner workings of an imagination and intellect and demonstrates an interior war conducted between intense feelings and a strong will--a situation close to what Freud would describe as the id in

conflict with the super-ego. The Mill on the Floss probes the complex psyche of a little rebel who, at once, performs brutal acts on a fetish in her attic refuge and does violence to her own desires by forcing herself to follow the severe asceticism of Thomas á Kempis.

It is true that when Mill on the Floss was published, Sigmund Freud was only four years old. However, Jerome Thale is kind enough to explain that "disclaiming the title of discoverer of the unconscious, Freud protested that the poets had discovered it and that he had merely formulated it" (40). By "poets," I assume he means "those who create fictive and imaginative works," that is, novelists and dramatists as well as writers of verse. Relative to Eliot's use of psychological elements in her fiction U. C. Knoepfelmacher indicates that

her characterization of Mr. Tulliver's imprudence and downfall, her sympathy with the plight of an extraordinary child, and her insights into the differences that separate Maggie from Tom are almost unmatched in Victorian fiction in their veracity and psychological penetration. (L & D 131)

More specifically, not only does Eliot anticipate Freud in The Mill with regard to studying and revealing the inner workings of Maggie's mind, she also deals with dreams and with some physical manifestations of a troubled psyche like masochism, transference, and escapism.

Throughout the novel, Maggie indulges in daydreams; however, she experiences a genuine dream while asleep on the trading vessel which has rescued Stephen and her from

the angry river. Eliot's narrator relates Maggie's dream:

She was in a boat on the wide water with Stephen, and in the gathering darkness something like a star appeared that grew and grew till they saw it was the Virgin seated in St. Ogg's boat, and it came nearer and nearer, till they saw the Virgin was Lucy and the boatman was Philip--no, not Philip, but her brother, who rowed past without looking at her; and she rose to stretch out her arms and call to him, and their own boat turned over with the movement, and they began to sink till with one spasm of dread she seemed to awake and find she was a child again in the parlour at evening twilight, and Tom was not really angry. From the soothed sense of that false waking she passed to the real waking. . . . There was a moment of utter bewilderment before her mind could get disentangled from the confused web of dreams, but soon the whole terrible truth urged itself upon her.

(Bk. VI, Ch. 14, 493-94)

Commenting on this passage, Elizabeth Villiers Gemmette states that this dream-passage allows the reader to look into Maggie's unconscious. She believes that Maggie cannot enter into a mature sexual relationship because of "an unresolved conflict involving her brother," which is manifested in the events of the dream. Gemmette compares Maggie to Thomas Hardy's Sue Bridehead and states that Miss Tulliver's rejection of a permanent, mature, sexual relationship with a man definitely had "Oedipal overtones" (29).

Maggie's dissatisfaction with herself, probably based primarily on Tom's rejection of her, vents itself through various forms of masochism. Some types are more subtle--like her practice of asceticism and extreme self-denial. When communicating to Philip why they cannot be together any longer, Maggie explains: "I may not keep

anything I used to love when I was little. . . . It is like death. . . . And I must part with you" (Bk. V, Ch. 1, 316). Despite Philip's reasonable objections to Maggie's "sacrifice" of him, she explains that "it makes the mind very free when we give up wishing" and look for nothing happy or rewarding from life (Bk. V, Ch. 1, 317). After her time on the Dutch vessel with Stephen, Maggie "made up her mind to suffer" (Bk. VI, Ch. 14, 497). She sees her life as one of renunciation, self-abnegation, and misery. Actually, Maggie embraces life as a source of pain probably because she believes that she deserves to be punished.

The Dodson sisters, Maggie's aunts, never cease comparing unacceptable and lamentable traits of the Tullivers to obviously positive Dodson qualities. Invariably in a conversation of this type, Maggie's cousin, Lucy Deane, is shown as the perfect child, a foil to point out Maggie Tulliver's physical and emotional characteristics as falling far short of those possessed by Lucy. Because of the frustration caused by having to listen to comparisons of her own dark and unmanageable hair with Lucy's fair and perfectly arranged tresses, Maggie runs up to her mother's room, picks up a scissors, and cuts off a large chunk of that hair so criticized by her aunts. She is willing to mutilate her hair in order to keep from hearing how thick it is and to make people "think her a clever little girl and not to find fault with her" (Bk. I,

Ch. 7, 72). Maggie's chopping away at her hair is, in fact, a desperate attempt to become someone else and to destroy the constantly criticized self. Her ultimate act of masochism is, of course, her choice to end her natural life rather than be separated from and disapproved of by her brother.

Maggie's fury at people's attitude toward her not only manifests itself in acts against her own physical and psychological well being; it extends to violent acts performed on her fetish. Maggie transfers the anger she wishes to express by performing violent acts upon the people in her life to the wooden doll which she keeps in the attic.

This attic was Maggie's favourite retreat on a wet day, when the weather was not too cold; here she fretted out all her ill humours . . . ; and here she kept a fetish, which she punished for all her misfortunes. This was the trunk of a large wooden doll, which once stared with the roundest of eyes above the reddest of cheeks, but was now entirely defaced by a long career of vicarious suffering. Three nails driven into the head commemorated as many crises in Maggie's nine years of earthly struggle. (Bk. I, Ch. 3, 34)

The narrator continues by telling the reader that Maggie "soothed herself by alternating grinding and beating the wooden head against the rough brick of the great chimney" (Bk. I, Ch. 3, 34). There is no question that Maggie is a passionate and physical person who is forced to live in a world where women were controlled and unexpressive. Her transference of anger and "acting out" to the fetish is indicative of psychological unrest and profound inability

to function as a social being within the social structure of St. Ogg's--even within the small society of the Dodson sisters and their families.

Maggie's inability to fit into her environment necessitates her retreat not only to the attic, but even into herself. It is a psychoanalytical truth that many people who cannot cope with their surroundings make use of some kind of opiate, which allows them to escape the confines of their unhappy circumstances temporarily. Maggie does not experiment with opium, as George Eliot did. She simply retreats into her own imagination where she can create a world which is happy and positive toward the Maggie who is accepted nowhere else--except in the company of Philip Wakem, the one person whom her brother has forbidden her to see. Maggie's world of daydreams is the only milieu where she is accepted, loved, and treated as her cousin Lucy is treated in real life. Eliot probes deeply into not only the conscious but also the unconscious interior of Maggie Tulliver. In the opinion of J. Hillis Miller, the mind of the author "enters into" Maggie Tulliver and "lives [her] experiences from within" (93), a tribute to a pre-Freudian author who was praised by both Henry James and D. H. Lawrence as one who accomplished that complex and innovative task.

* * * * *

One of the major controversies over Mill on the Floss is the question of determinism and freedom. Many of the descriptions of Maggie and Tom indicate that Maggie is a Tulliver and Tom a Dodson. Of course, in the eyes of the Dodson aunts, being a Tulliver is a negative trait. This emphasis on heredity often leads the casual critic to evaluate the text as deterministic without seriously studying both the words and the actions of the narrator and the characters. It is true that Maggie tells Philip Wakem: "Our life is determined for us--and it makes the mind very free when we give up wishing and only think of bearing what is laid upon us and doing what is given us to do;" but the reader knows that this theory is not indicative of the narrator's beliefs, and George Eliot's lifestyle attests to the fact that it does not coincide with her beliefs either. Actually, Philip's response is more in line with the thinking of both the narrator and the author. He answers: "But I can't give up wishing. . . . It seems to me we can never give up longing and wishing while we are thoroughly alive" (Bk. V, Ch. 1, 317).

It is coincidental, but not irrelevant, that Charles Darwin published his Origin of the Species while Eliot was writing The Mill on the Floss. Because of her relationship with Spencer, Eliot was privy to much of the evolutionary theory contained in the text, a fact which could explain the timeliness of her lengthy discussion of Dodson/Tulliver

inherited traits--both physical and emotional--throughout the first half of the text. Maggie is depicted as contrary, dark-skinned, and as unmanageable as her wild hair. She has Tulliver traits, which are judged to be negative by the Dodson sisters; she is a free spirit; she not only displays initiative, but she acts impulsively. Tom, on the other hand, is conforming and traditional, "more comfortable with concrete rather than abstract" (Bk. II, Ch. 2, 151)--Dodson traits pleasing to his aunts; for as the narrator tells us, "the religion of the Dodsons consisted in revering whatever was customary and respectable" (Bk. IV, Ch. 1, 288). Tom does that. He lacks the Tulliver creativity which could have enabled him to do otherwise.

As the commentary on the Dodsons develops, there is more said between the lines about how both the narrator and the author react to the sisters and to their families than is stated in the text. Eliot treats their "code" with the utmost irony. She shows great disdain for their traditional ways. She has the narrator explain that

if in the maiden days of the Dodson sisters their Bibles opened more easily at some parts than others, it was because of dried tulip-petals, which had been distributed quite impartially, without preference for the historical, devotional, or doctrinal. Their religion was of a simple, semipagan kind, but there was no heresy in it--if heresy properly means choice--for they didn't know there was any other religion, except that of chapelgoers, which appeared to run in families, like asthma. (Bk. IV, Ch. 1, 187-88)

The Dodsons would never break with tradition, that is, the

religion and practices of their forebears, because they lack the imagination to question and the initiative to go their own ways. The narrator continues by telling us that traditions run in the Tulliver family also. The Tullivers have established a tradition of breaking tradition. Their family heritage includes heavy doses of "generous imprudence, warm affection, and hot-tempered rashness" (Bk. IV, Ch. 1, 189). Consequently, we are led to understand that the imaginative Tullivers are incomprehensible to the uncreative Dodsons; and, therefore, the high-spirited, imaginative, and iconoclastic Maggie is totally beyond the realm of Tom's limited ability to understand. Maggie's gift and curse is her imagination, her ability to deny the inherited tradition of the Dodsons and to act on a new code which her creativity has allowed her to develop for herself. This refusal to be "determined" by tradition is demonstrated at the outset of the novel when her Dodson mother tells her to get on with her patchwork and Maggie responds: "It's foolish work . . . tearing things to pieces to sew 'em together again" (Bk. I, Ch. 2, 19).

Eliot spent much of her time trying to work through opposing principles like determinism and free will. Ian Adam believes that George Eliot

was fascinated by characters who face contending ethical claims; and, as her entire oeuvre reveals, she frequently writes with her highest powers most fully engaged when considering the interaction of thought and feeling at times of decision. Thought corrupted by

feeling; thought denying legitimacy to feeling; feeling and thought in harmony; feeling responding to human need without intercession of any irritable reaching after fact and reason. ("Ambivalence" 125)

Adam further explains that these conflicts between feeling and thought make up the consciousness of Maggie Tulliver, who is described by the narrator in the text as the embodiment of "a sense of opposing elements, of which a fierce collision is imminent" (Bk. V, Ch. 1, 314). Maggie is a being at war within herself. Maybe the war is between the Dodson and Tulliver elements; maybe it is between the old and the new; maybe it is between the intellect and the imagination; and maybe the war embodies all of these opposing forces--and more. According to George Levine, George Eliot viewed determinism as having opposing forces within it, forces which at once made it both "dangerous and morally essential" (113). Eliot was no determinist. Her philosophical history and non-conforming life style attest to that; but she recognized the fact that a certain amount of determinism is essential. There are hereditary factors which are fixed--for better or worse, and there is a certain value which the past has even as it determines the present. The danger is obvious, as one look at the Dodsons--and at Maggie--will attest.

Calling Mill on the Floss a "very Darwinian novel," Barbara Hardy explains that "its debt to Darwin is to be found in its hard and pessimistic look at struggle and survival" ("Mill" 53). This pessimism is communicated

through Maggie's inevitable and seemingly senseless death. However, if we accept Levine's selection of "the quest for unity" (113) as the predominant theme of the novel, then Maggie's ultimate drowning in the arms of Tom is not pessimistic at all. It is, in fact, a fulfilling experience, a death freely chosen, a happy climax to a troubled life which occurs when Maggie understands not only exactly what she has been searching for but also that Tom's love and understanding are finally hers.

The controversy over the deterministic elements in The Mill and its exposure of free choice are probably more in balance than most critics recognize them to be. Certainly, those characters who can be portrayed as deterministic far outnumber those who exemplify freedom of action; but, among the central characters, only Tom--until his moment of enlightenment in the final tragic scene--denies free will and clings to traditional deterministic principles.

Jean-Paul Sartre, of course, took a much harder line against determinism than anyone of Eliot's time could have. However, Eliot did anticipate his position to the extent that she refused to conform to the expectations of the traditional, provincial background from which she had come. In his essay, "Existentialism is a Humanism," Sartre cites Maggie Tulliver as an example of one who, according to the requirements of a character in an Existentialist

novel, acts freely as she attempts to achieve solidarity with her brother. Sartre writes:

Let us take The Mill on the Floss. We find here a certain young woman, Maggie Tulliver, who is an incarnation of the value of passion and is aware of it. She is in love with a young man, Stephen, who is engaged to another, an insignificant young woman. This Maggie Tulliver, instead of heedlessly seeking her own happiness, chooses in the name of human solidarity to sacrifice herself and to give up the man she loves.

(308)

In this case, Sartre writes, it is quite clear that for Maggie, "the overruling aim is freedom." She prefers, "in resignation, to give up her lover." He concludes by stating that the true Existentialist heroine "can choose anything, but only if it is upon the plane of free commitment" (309). His use of Maggie Tulliver as an example of one who acts upon her free will is tantamount with his saying that Maggie is not a victim of determinism; her free spirit is, in fact, free.

Several other principles of Sartrean Existentialism also apply to Maggie, a precursor of the Existentialist heroine. According to Sartre, "the existentialist frankly states that man is in anguish" ("Humanism" 292)--Maggie is in anguish. Its doctrine teaches that Existentialism "confronts man with the possibility of choice" ("Humanism" 289), an opportunity which the deterministic Dodsons could not comprehend. Finally,

the Existentialist does not believe in the power of

passion. He will never regard grand passion as a destructive torrent upon which a man is swept into certain actions as by fate, and which, therefore, is an excuse for them. He thinks that man is responsible for his passion; ("Humanism" 295)

and Maggie Tulliver is certainly responsible for hers. The "torrent" of her passion for Stephen Guest, symbolized by the "torrent" of the river at storm and flood stage, never blurs the freedom of choice which she knows she has. Can we say that Maggie Tulliver is an Existentialist heroine? Certainly not in the true sense of the term; but Sartre cites her as an example of the freedom enjoyed and practiced by those who call themselves Existentialists, and so to associate her with that category cannot be categorically heretical.

* * * * *

Perhaps more in The Mill on the Floss than in any other of her novels, George Eliot placed consistent emphasis on the psychological. In this, Eliot anticipated some of the major concerns of the modern novel: the importance of motivation, the process through which the human consciousness goes to arrive at decisions, and the frail relationship between resolution and execution. She believed that her artistic purpose was to present realistic human beings from both an external and an internal viewpoint to an audience which could interact with, pity, and judge them from its own experience with alternating

success and failure in making and carrying out right-minded choices. Moreover, Eliot presented not only characters who act sometimes from virtue and sometimes from vice, but--in many instances--characters who actually fall from a pattern of responsible action because of a moment of weakness. Consistent with her philosophical belief in the three stages of man's development--selfishness, awareness of the I-Thou relationship, and altruism--Eliot demonstrated the psyches of her varied characters as moving either through one of these states or from level to level within the paradigm.

Interrelated with characters, their stages of development, and their conscious motivational patterns as both the cause and the effect thereof is the question of morality and ethics. George Eliot was often criticized for her presentation of characters as "mixed" in their behavior patterns. What did not seem to be understood by typical nineteenth-century readers was Eliot's vision of the character as evolving toward altruism. Her norms for judging morality and ethics were based on an individual's growth rather than his perfection. Relevant to this issue, in May of 1860, Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton wrote a letter to John Blackwood in which he reacted negatively regarding Maggie's position towards Stephen. He indicated that

it may be quite natural that she should take that liking to him, but it is a position at variance with all that had before been heroic about her. The

indulgence of such a sentiment for the affianced of a friend under whose roof she was, was a treachery and a meanness according to the Ethics of Art, and nothing can afterwards lift the character into the same hold on us. The refusal to marry Stephen fails to do so. (Letters 3: 317)

Responding to this position of Sir Edward, George Eliot indicated to Blackwood that her presentation of that relationship was "too vital a part of [her] whole conception and purpose for [her] to be converted to the condemnation of it." In her usual free-thinking manner, she simply told Blackwood that

if the ethics of art do not admit the truthful presentation of a character essentially noble but liable to great error--error that is anguish to its own nobleness--then, it seems to me the ethics of art are too narrow, and must be widened to correspond with a widening psychology. (Letters 3: 317-18)

This "widening psychology" included the portrayal of human beings as more complex than fiction had shown them in the past. Joan Bennett suggests that Eliot never dealt with "a simple division of characters into good and bad." Rather she envisioned each character as an emerging person and communicated her belief that

the individual [character], like the environment, has evolved and is evolving; his and her behaviour at any given moment is the inevitable result of all that has gone before; therefore, while the action can itself be judged, both in relation to its consequences and to its aesthetic beauty, . . . the doer is not presented judicially but compassionately. (101)

Although in former times drama treated characters "essentially noble, but liable to great error," Joan Bennett states that "it is a conception that rarely occurs

in English prose fiction before George Eliot" (116). In that dramatic scene when Stephen Guest comes to Moss's house in search of Maggie, he decries her rejection of him:

"It is unnatural, it is horrible. Maggie, if you loved me as I love you, you should throw everything else to the winds for the sake of belonging to each other. We should break all these mistaken ties that were made in blindness, and determine to marry each other. . . . We can't help the pain we give." (Bk. VI, Ch. 11, 469-70)

Maggie's response to him indicates her noble purpose--even though she has previously made the inconsiderate and unwise choice to go in the boat alone with Stephen. Here, perhaps more than anywhere else in the novel, Eliot shows the vulnerability of a human being. She demonstrates clearly that good people do not always act in the best interest of the community, just as she later shows--in the person of Stephen--that selfish people do not always act out of a lack of concern for others.

Human frailty is more dominant in Stephen, but it obviously exists in Maggie also. Her response to him is indicative of her depth of concern for the feelings of others:

"The real tie lies in the feelings and expectations we have raised in other minds. Else all pledges might be broken when there was no outward penalty. There would be no such thing as faithfulness. . . . I must not, cannot, seek my own happiness by sacrificing others." (Bk. IV, Ch. 11, 470-71)

Eliot's dedication to dealing with the reality of life was such that she felt compelled to demonstrate the mix of good and evil, of wisdom and folly, of selfishness and altruism

in the consciousness of her characters as they evolve and interact in their various societies.

In this most autobiographical of Eliot's novels, much of the sense of being torn in two which we observe in Maggie Tulliver reflects that lifelong feeling in the novelist herself. In many instances, critical evaluations of the person of George Eliot or the character of Maggie Tulliver seem interchangeable. For example, Bernard J. Paris makes this statement about the personal development and individual moral achievement of Eliot which, I believe, is equally applicable to Maggie:

The individual who has a strongly sympathetic nature combined with profound personal experience and the ability to imagine the inner states of others has a moral life that is independent of tradition; he has a moral highly developed conscience and a truer sense of good and evil than tradition, in its present state of development, could supply. The sympathetic tendencies can lead a person to rebel against the harsh usages of tradition, even when such rebellion involves great personal risk. ("Religion" 17)

In the case of both Eliot and Maggie, such sensitivity creates great suffering. Morality, like religion, is a value which George Eliot created for herself--eclectically. She allowed truth to speak to her in all forms and structured her own morality through the process of selecting what appeared to be best and closest to man's best interest; in addition to this, she refused to accept tradition for its own sake, that is, without questioning its relevance. This is not to say that Eliot refused to see the value of tradition because such was not the case.

Much that is meaningful, moral, and contributory to growth springs from tradition. However, tradition can only supply society with these important values after it has been examined and determined positive by the individuals and families of which society is made up. Eliot believed strongly in the "sustaining power of tradition" (Levine 118), but she also believed in individual growth through conscious assent only to that which offered potential for development of both the person and society.

Although tradition plays an important role in the message of Mill on the Floss, it is not its focal point. Primarily, this is a novel about choice. Ian Adam states that one should notice "Maggie's oscillating glances" throughout the novel. He believes that they "suggest the deliberations which lead to choice." In the case of The Mill, choice is presented as the fruit of a value system which is built upon conscious evaluation, concern for others, and self-sacrifice; and in the novel, the fact that this is Maggie's value system and not society's creates most of the conflict. Adam concludes this portion of his argument by suggesting that "George Eliot is unusual in the stress she gives to [the novel's] philosophic, ethical and psychological dimensions" ("Ambivalence" 125). "Unusual," yes. George Eliot was no ordinary novelist--as she was no ordinary person. She had spent most of her life dealing with philosophers and their works and pondering the

inner workings of the human psyche--both as it operates within the individual and as it interacts with other consciousnesses. The dimension which such knowledge brings to Eliot's novels differs little from the dimension which it brought to her life. The two seem to mirror one another.

Both the Dodson family and St. Ogg's society demonstrate the dangers of adherence to tradition for its own sake. An unthinking society tends to ostracize its thinking members. Maggie is treated like an outcast because unthinking minds are closed to her. Ian Adam explains how Eliot demonstrated the problem which lay at the heart of Maggie's alienation:

After Maggie's rejection of Stephen and return to St Ogg's, both the satiric exposure of community response and Dr Kenn's comments to Maggie that the present Christian community, having lost an original sense of fraternity, cannot appreciate the ethical value of her choice, raise to dangerous awareness the fact that with few exceptions . . . St Ogg's is not a source of moral well-being but rather the embodiment of a malign conventionality. ("Ambivalence" 131)

These people are not involved either individually or collectively in any kind of growth process. Maggie, on the other hand, is a person undergoing development. Bernard J. Paris believes that George Eliot depicted Maggie as arriving "by a completely natural process at the Religion of Humanity." He explains that Maggie "draws upon the species for strength and she participates through love and sorrow in the life of mankind" (Experiments 167). The

conflict occurs because Maggie's growth encounters St. Ogg's stagnation. In addition to which, old morality, where one does because his father did with no serious consideration or judgment about what is best in the here and now, has a tendency to persecute new morality, in which questions are asked and challenges are launched, the resolutions of which require objectivity--and even change. Maggie--and perhaps Philip Wakem--challenged the idea of revering the old just because it was old, and both experienced great unhappiness and suffering because of the position they took. The immediate society of St. Ogg's remained closed to them; and therefore, alienation was the best that could be hoped for.

Obviously, Maggie Tulliver is the moral center of the text. By both Feuerbachian and Sartrean standards, her final act--which Feuerbach would refer to as "altruistic" and which Sartre calls "free"--is one of nobility. Morality, according to George Eliot, is present when the well-being of others is perceived as the highest good. It seems fair to conclude that Maggie's final act of risking her own life in an attempt to save Tom qualifies that act as one of heroism performed on the highest plain of moral achievement.

However, Feuerbach, Sartre, and Eliot are not the only judges of the value of Maggie's choice. In his assessment of Maggie's role in the closing chapters of the

text, Knoepfmacher relegates her actions to the level of "a victim of accident and chance" (L & D 133). This, of course, removes from the heroine any freedom of choice, any self-sacrifice, any achievement of a higher goal. He comprehends what George Eliot was trying to do with the close of The Mill, but he sees the result as falling short of the purpose. He explains that Eliot was a moralist

eager to fight off despair by denying the logic of a totally anarchic universe. Resisting the nihilism of Hardy, [she is] therefore led to extract a moral order from the "hard, real life" [she finds] so intractable. [She tries] to suggest how a true understanding of the world might have prevented the tragedy to which [her] creations succumb. . . . The overtly realistic George Eliot . . . finds it . . . difficult to accommodate reason and hope, explanation and yearning. (L & D 118)

Like Knoepfmacher, Barbara Hardy objects to the end of the novel. She believes that it represents "bad faith" because it presents too severe a contrast with "the authenticity of everything that comes before" ("Mill" 50). A rather universal objection to the conclusion refers to it as excessively romantic. To this evaluation David Daiches responds: "George Eliot . . . was too intelligent ever to try to solve a moral problem by mere sentimentality" ("G.E." 72).

* * * * *

Despite the heavy emphasis on the psychological and moral factors for which Mill on the Floss is noted, the novel contains an underlying Wordsworthian manifestation of nature and several examples of prevailing, and almost

thematic, symbols. George Eliot's profile as an accomplished novelist is more evident in The Mill than it was in any of her previous works. Mill on the Floss demonstrates very well the breadth and depth to which her intelligence and experience had led her. Eliot, more than a Victorian concerned with the middle-class work ethic and the welfare of society, recalls Wordsworth and imitates the spirit of Baudelaire even as she immerses herself into the psychology, development, and motivation of characters as they interact with one another in a milieu of morality and growth throughout the tragedy. Perhaps it is this description which embodies better than any other my categorizing Eliot as an eclectic. To label her anything else seems to limit one's comments and to distort that literary accomplishment which was George Eliot.

It seems that whenever Eliot began to describe the beauty of nature, she could not resist creating a passage reminiscent of her mentor, William Wordsworth. St. Ogg's, we are told,

shows its aged, fluted red roofs and the broad gables of its wharves between the low wooded hill and the river brink, tinging the water with a soft purple hue under the transient glance of this February sun. Far away on each hand stretch the high pastures and the patches of dark earth made ready for the seed of broad-leaved green crops or touched already with the tint of the tender-bladed autumn-sown corn. There is a remnant still of the last year's golden clusters of beehive ricks rising at intervals beyond the hedgerows; and everywhere the hedgerows are studded with trees.

(Bk. I, Ch. 1, 11)

This portion of the opening paragraph of Mill on the Floss

recalls these lines in "Tintern Abbey":

Once again I see
These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines
Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms,
Green to the very door. (Lls. 14-17)

In both cases, the pastoral images are followed by an equally descriptive passage about the river. Eliot wrote:

Just by the red-roofed town the tributary Ripple flows
with a lively current into the Floss. How lovely the
little river is, with its dark, changing wavelets! I
wander along the bank and listen to its low, placid
voice, as to the voice of one who is deaf and loving.
(Bk. I, Ch. 1, 11-12)

Wordsworth projected this same supportive and regenerative function to the river Wye:

When the fretful stir
Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
Have hung upon the beatings of my heart --
How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
O sylvan Wye! thou wanderer thro' the woods,
How often has my spirit turned to thee!
(Lls. 52-57)

Going even beyond descriptive passages regarding nature, Eliot recalled Wordsworth's philosophy of the function of the imagination. She had the narrator of The Mill rely on his "inward eye" to call up a visual memory of St. Ogg's. Pressing his elbows into the arms of his chair brings back the sensation he experienced long ago when he used to press his arms onto the "cold stone" of the bridge at Dorlcote Mill. Years before, he stored away images of the river, the town, and the mill which are now able to be called up and described in detail. This Wordsworthian use of the imagination recalls another

passage from "Tintern Abbey":

These beauteous forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet.
(Lls.22-27)

A third Wordsworthian element to which the narrator refers is the innocence of childhood. In the passage where Maggie's childhood promise to kiss Philip the next time she sees him is recalled, Eliot tells us that Maggie's boarding school training taught her that fulfilling the oath was "out of the question, and Philip would not expect it." The narrator comments that "the promise was void, like so many other sweet, illusory promises of our childhood; void as promises made in Eden before the seasons were divided" (Bk. II, Ch. 7, 200).

The narrator blends all three Wordsworthian concepts into a single unified statement as he observes the beauties of a "mild May day" while walking through a wilderness adjacent to St. Ogg's. He thinks:

These familiar flowers, these well-remembered bird-notes, this sky with its fitful brightness, these furrowed and grassy fields, each with a sort of personality given to it by the capricious hedgerows--such things as these are the mother tongue of our imagination, the language that is laden with all the subtle inextricable associations the fleeting hours of our childhood left behind them. (Bk. I, Ch. 5, 48)

Referring to the author who designed these words for the narrator, Ruby Redinger wrote concerning this passage: "She, with Wordsworth, had rediscovered the cause of the

splendor in the grass--what he had called the intimations of immortality" (425).

Throughout the text, just as the beauties of the land indicate a sense of safety and kindness, so the flow of the waters brings with it a feeling of danger and hostility. The water is very similar to Maggie herself. Its driving force is the very life blood of the mill, but its misdirection creates havoc among not only the Dodsons and Tullivers but also among the townspeople. Maggie's personality somehow embodies the "rush of the water and the booming of the mill" (Bk. I, Ch. 1, 12). Her mother sees her as "wanderin' up an' down by the water, like a wild thing." Bessie Tulliver fears that Maggie will "tumble in some day" (Bk. I, Ch. 2, 17). "The idea of Maggie sitting alone by the pond" bothers her mother a great deal. Actually, the sight of it, "roused an habitual fear in Mrs. Tulliver's mind." As Maggie and Tom go out to play near the water, their mother utters an unintentional prophecy: "They're such children for the water, mine are; . . . they'll be brought in dead and drowned some day" (Bk. I, Ch. 10, 114). This river, threatening and unpredictable as it is, is the central symbol of the text.

The river represents both progress and impairment, growth and destruction, life and death. Actually, it symbolizes life's unanswerable questions and all of those

things which resist man's comprehension and control. The river is the very sine qua non of Dorlcote Mill; but eventually, it becomes the mill's destroyer. Maggie loves the river; but the river, which through many years seems her "playmate," eventually causes both her disgrace and finally her death.

It is also probable that the river represents change--the kind of change which must destroy in order to create. Following this interpretation to its end, we might envision the river as equal to the flow of time, which carries the present into the future and leaves nothing the same. At one point in the story, Stephen Guest explains to Maggie that the tide has taken them. "See," he says, "how the tide is carrying us out, away from all those unnatural bonds that we have been trying to make faster around us, and trying in vain" (Bk. VI, Ch. 13, 488). Here he seems to be equating the movement of the river and the direction of the tide with the concept of inevitability--fate, perhaps. The river flows through each of the seven books of Mill on the Floss, changing its role as it changes its level and its tides. Like Edith Wharton's "Starkfield winters" and Albert Camus's "plague," this river is an antagonist. It is indeed possible that the primary interpretation of the river as symbol is that which recognizes it as a cunning and merciless adversary.

Around the person of Maggie Tulliver, George Eliot has created her most heavily psychological novel. The narrator describes a young woman profoundly involved in escapism. He tells us that "if she could have had all Scott's novels and all Byron's poems, then perhaps she might have found happiness enough to dull her sensibility to her actual daily life" (Bk. IV, Ch. 2, 301). Aside from her escape into Romantic literature, Maggie lost herself in the asceticism of Thomas à Kempis. His Imitation of Christ "came to Maggie as an unquestioned message" (Bk. IV, Ch. 2, 306) and "helped her through years of loneliness" (Bk. IV, Ch. 2, 308).

Eliot created Maggie as an alienated individual who cannot be totally at one with any other human being. There is always something which keeps her apart from those she loves: her brother keeps her from Philip; society keeps her from Stephen; the fact that she is a female alienates her from her father; and her personality and character separate Maggie from her brother. Often she cries "bitter tears; everybody in the world seemed so hard and unkind to Maggie; there was no indulgence, no fondness. . . . And if life had no love in it, what else was there for Maggie?" (Bk. III, Ch. 5, 249). Through her escapist techniques and because of her alienation, the passionate Maggie leads an intense inward life.

Anticipating modern fiction, the novel raises a

number of morally complex questions--and does not attempt to answer them. It proposes conflicts with no resolutions and allows needless and seemingly gratuitous unrewarded pain. Indeed, The Mill on the Floss studies the "great problem of the shifting relation between passion and duty" and concludes that that relationship is "clear to no man who is capable of apprehending it" (Bk. VII, Ch. 2, 520).

Chapter V

Middlemarch

The effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.

George Eliot, Middlemarch

George Eliot's Middlemarch is the only one of her seven novels to be named specifically after a town. For Eliot, the geographic area of Middlemarch signified a place located in the "middle of the marches" which was inhabited by an intricately woven network of mediocre or average people--the "middle marchers," the "middle-of-the-roaders." Despite this, when Eliot named the town in this seemingly uncomplimentary manner, she did leave some room for positive interpretation. The name "Middlemarch" also indicated "marching," that is, motion--perhaps even forward motion. Therefore, it would seem that the novelist did not intend to present the Middlemarchers as totally stagnant. Mark Schorer notes that "everyone and everything in this novel is moving on a 'way.' Life is a progress, and it is variously and inevitably described as road, stream, channel, avenue, way, journey, voyage, ride, . . . vista, chain, line, course, path, and process" (709).

Indeed, there is undeniably movement among the marchers. U. C. Knoepfelmacher agrees that the novel "is centered around the idea of motion and exploration." He believes that

the progress of the individual characters, their strides forward, their halts, indecisions, and detours, are contrasted with each other and assessed against the larger movements of historical change. The novel's own shuttlelike motions encourage this continuous process of contrast and assessment by weaving separate strands into an evergrowing tissue of relations and connections. (L & D 188)

The mistakes and false starts of the Middlemarchers cannot be construed as lack of progress or forward motion. Rather, Eliot attempted to demonstrate both man's ability to learn from his errors and his resilience and hope even after multiple failures.

Schorer is basically in agreement with these opinions. He believes that the subject of Middlemarch is community, and the theme is the nature of progress. He cites as examples names which either affirm or deny forward motion: "Brooke, a running course, and Lydgate, his progress . . . twice-blocked by his name" (712). In general, Schorer's evaluations of subject and theme seem valid; but specifically, the theme of Middlemarch really focuses more on man's interaction with society, with his alternating role of protagonist and antagonist as he plays out his life-drama in its context, and with the nature of growth and change. Joan Bennett calls it "the interpenetration between the life of a community and the

individual lives that compose it" (82).

Calvin Bedient makes several statements about George Eliot's creation of Middlemarch. In general, he calls the novel detached, dark, and restrained (82). Although Bedient praises the work as a "creative miracle . . . written out of her full intelligence" (82), he attaches to it a negative tone of disillusionment. Despite the fact that there is a fine line between becoming disillusioned and giving up the idealism of youth, the two are not the same. Middlemarch is primarily a novel of initiation, a serious fictional consideration of growth and change.

Bedient continues his comments by indicating that Middlemarch is a naturalistic work. He states that "Middlemarch makes the discovery of the age -- of Comte, Darwin, Marx -- that the environment is the only protagonist. Here, dismally, the community seeps into the noble characters and gradually fills them with itself" (85). The important factor that Bedient overlooks here deals with the freedom of choice enjoyed by those who populate the fictional town of the novel. Jean-Paul Sartre praised Mill on the Floss for Maggie's freedom of choice; but if any of Eliot's characters is free, it is Will Ladislaw--and even Dorothea Brooke. For example, Will comes and goes as he pleases, involves himself alternately in art and politics, and refuses to have his life governed--or even influenced negatively--by his elder relative,

Casaubon. With regard to Dorothea Brooke, every set of circumstances in which she finds herself is one which she has freely chosen. True, some situations reflect errors in judgment on her part, but the fact remains that she has made the choices. Dorothea's entire growth process, her entire motion through the novel, reflects a series of free choices, re-evaluations, and both physical and attitudinal changes.

It is also true that reality -- probably what Bedient refers to when he talks about "environment" -- forces Dorothea to alter or adapt her idealism, not to fall victim to the overruling forces of determinism. Unlike Ladislav and Dorothea, Lydgate eventually succumbs to materialism, which necessitates the death of his dream. On one hand, he can be considered a victim of society; but on the other hand, Lydgate puts himself into his ultimate precarious position by making choices which do not bring the results he has planned. Finally, I believe that the changes in Will, Dorothea, and Lydgate are either chosen freely or they are the direct result of situations entered into because of other free choices. It would seem, therefore, that the negative determinism pointed out by Calvin Bedient could not flourish in a community where free will and personal choice prevail.

It is Bedient's further belief that "there is in Middlemarch . . . a collapse of both the poetry of social

life and the poetry of ambition" and, indeed, a "collapse of George Eliot's world of belief" (94). This opinion appears to be in disagreement with Eliot's own statement made in a letter to Alexander Main about the tone of the novel. She wrote: "I need not tell you that my book will not present my own feeling about human life if it produces on readers whose minds are really receptive the impression of blank melancholy and despair" (Letters 5: 261). Eliot's efforts with Middlemarch were directed toward presenting individuals attempting to reconcile the ideal with the real in a society which attempts to kill idealism but which will accept idealism in an altered, or at least a more realistic, state. As Bernard J. Paris writes: "George Eliot's . . . novels show men and women grappling with the circumstances of their lives, seeking ways to escape frustration and despair, searching for a home for themselves in the world" (Experiments 24). In accordance with this, Middlemarch does not reflect the collapse of George Eliot's world of belief; rather it represents her mature--altered--world of belief, a world in which the search for truth and a wholesome concern for the welfare of others were primary.

Although the underlying feeling that Middlemarch creates for the reader is a sense of contact with Victorian society, George Eliot, in the spirit of true eclecticism and objectivity, was nevertheless able to integrate into

the text not only Wordsworthian doctrines, psychological analyses, and Existentialist principles, but also the nineteenth century conflicts between rich and poor, science and religion, and true and false piety. Reflective of all that the mid-nineteenth century was about, "Middlemarch is concerned with nearly every important activity in community life -- political, clerical, agricultural, industrial, professional, domestic . . . [and] scholarly" (Schorer 713). Eliot's vast intelligence and experience seem to come together in Middlemarch to produce what the Academy reviewer judged to be "Eliot's greatest work," which had "scarcely a superior and very few equals in the whole wide range of English fiction" (Haight, Selected Letters 357). Joan Bennett attributes the brilliance and success of Middlemarch to Eliot's familiarity with provincial life, "the environment she most fully understood," and calls the novel her masterpiece (82).

George Eliot's sympathetic consciousness of provincial life allowed her to depict Middlemarch as a realistic and living place. Her presence in the text should be less associated with her likeness to Dorothea Brooke and more primarily attributed to her keen awareness of individual interaction in nineteenth-century rural England. Although it would be a mistake to identify George Eliot as the narrator, a reader cannot forget that the "intelligence and emotion, judgment and sympathy, irony and

sentimentality" (Kenney 734) of the narrator are absolutely dependent upon the attitudes and feelings of the author herself. As the narrator displays empathy for and honest evaluation of the actions and feelings of the Middlemarchers, so Eliot--in her effort to enlarge the sympathies of her reading audience--delicately wove her own inner convictions about man judging and aiding his fellows into the subtle interaction of the narrator with the characters and situations of the novel. George Eliot saw herself as caring for "that which is essentially human" and as desiring "to exhibit it under all forms with loving truthfulness." She believed that "if Art does not enlarge men's sympathies, it does nothing morally" (Letters 3: 111). These principles are obvious in the Eliot-like narrator of Middlemarch.

As always, Eliot displayed her characters as coming from two principal viewpoints: the selfish and the selfless, the egocentric and the altruistic. Her Doctrine of Sympathy is evident here on three levels: 1) Eliot's sympathy for all who suffer in provincial society; 2) the narrator's sympathy for those who experience pain and difficulty in Middlemarch; and 3) the more highly evolved characters' sympathy for their fellow fictional individuals who need help and understanding. Quentin Anderson believes that Middlemarch has as its underlying theme "people's opinions about one another" (144). Although Eliot, as

novelist, is essentially the creative force behind all of these levels of concerned involvement, her delicate fusion and diffusion of empathy within and between the levels makes a striking case for the salvific powers of humanity.

Obviously Dorothea is the most altruistic citizen of Middlemarch. Her initial decision to marry Casaubon, although it is somewhat tinged with selfish interests, has for its primary goal assisting him to complete a great work for the benefit of mankind. After the demise of the Romantic dream in which she sees him as a guide along the grand path of life where there can be "nothing trivial," where she will experience day-by-day ecstasy as if she were married to Pascal (Bk. I, Ch. 3, 14), Dorothea perseveres through her commitment to Casaubon, an accomplishment which requires not only helping another individual but sacrificing oneself for the sake of a man who, by his own admission, lives "too much with the dead" (Bk. I, Ch. 2, 9).

Lydgate, although he begins with high ideals about discovering physiological facts which will better men's lives, involves himself in situations which drive him inward and cut off his sense of doing good for mankind. Casaubon, the epitome of the self-seeker whose "passionate longings," according to the narrator, "clung low and mist-like in very shady places" (Bk. IV, Ch. 42, 294), regresses from being a solitary researcher into the dead past to

becoming a drain on the vitality of Dorothea for the accomplishment of his necrophilian purposes. Middlemarch is an imperfect town inhabited by imperfect citizens who range from the altruistic Dorothea, who nevertheless has her faults, to the self-centered Casaubon, who--despite his prevailing image-- occasionally displays a few redeeming qualities.

But where is Middlemarch? The most obvious answer to that is--it's a border region, a frontier. A march is located away from big cities, away from progress, away from education. The land can also be a marsh, a place where one might become "stuck in a rut" or "bogged down." Anderson believes that Middlemarch "is on the periphery of the great world, not simply the world of London or even Rome, but the world of science, the arts, and of history." He further believes that "realized human greatness does not enter it" (158). This theory can explain why Ladislav keeps coming to and leaving Middlemarch and why he and Dorothea eventually have to depart from the little provincial town and establish themselves in London where their energies might produce some possibly significant sociopolitical amelioration of England--and even perhaps of the human condition. On the other hand, Anderson's belief can also support Eliot's choice that Casaubon die and be buried there. Despite all of this, Middlemarch is not condemned by George Eliot as is St. Ogg's. Knoepfmacher states that

rather than indicting the town as a City of Destruction such as that which had suppressed Maggie, [Eliot] regards it as a microcosm of the fallible world which characters and readers must learn to accept. Though imperfect, the Middlemarchers become-- . . . like a Greek chorus--the means for retribution and justice.

(L & D 194)

So Middlemarch is not a town which kills its own, located somewhere near or in Dante's "Inferno." Rather it is an anteroom, a place where the mediocre can exist and even improve, a training ground from which those who recognize it for what it is can move away. Perhaps, in Eliot's eyes, Middlemarch is the hometown of "everyman."

The Existential everyman is isolated, alienated, free to make his own choices, but unable to connect with the will and choices of others. In Middlemarch, Eliot presents two couples whose matrimonial state does not even approach anything like unity. Of Lydgate and Rosamond, the narrator tells us that "between him and her indeed there was that total missing of each other's mental track" (Bk. VI, Ch. 58, 405), and that "she had no more identified herself with him than if they had been creatures of different species and opposing interests" (Bk. VI, Ch. 58, 412). Indeed Rosamond and Lydgate "each lived in a world of which the other knew nothing" (Bk. II, Ch. 16, 114). The picture of the marriage of Dorothea and Casaubon is similar. Again, the narrator informs us that "what was fresh to her mind was worn out to his" (Bk. II, Ch. 20, 136) and that "she was as blind to his inward troubles as

he to hers" (Bk. II, Ch. 20, 139). This type of isolation "under the same roof" anticipates the loneliness and alienation of Camus's L'Etranger, Virginia Woolf's Lighthouse characters, and Joyce's Dubliners.

George Eliot's knowledge of psychology and motivation prompted her to perfect the concept of the inside/outside look at each individual character in her fiction. In Middlemarch she brought this attribute to its highest refinement. The Middlemarch narrator is very perceptive and very thorough in his commentary on the thoughts and actions of Eliot's characters. What the narrator says, what he judges, what the dialogue contains, and what characters believe about one another and about themselves all work together to give the reader a total and unified understanding of who each character really is. Kerry McSweeney calls the sum of this information penetrating and complementary. In addition to these means of revealing the who of each character, McSweeney notes that

the reader's knowledge of each is further assisted by implicit or explicit comparison with the others. All the central characters exist within the same ideological and thematic framework. . . . For example, the moral character of each can be focused and assessed by gauging the degree of egotism or self-absorption as opposed to the degree of fellow-feeling and altruistic concern, and by applying George Eliot's favourite litmus-paper tests of good character: the ability to see connections between and relate different strands of experience; and the quality and breadth of emotion.

(81)

As far as modern characteristics of Middlemarch are

concerned, this psychological analysis of character to which McSweeney refers is probably of primary importance. Insofar as this novel is concerned, however, D. H. Lawrence's statement about Eliot's "putting the action inside" is not sufficient. In Middlemarch, Eliot actually deals with the dual personality of Dorothea and the alter ego of Bulstrode--two highly refined psychological concepts which are very characteristic of Joseph Conrad, a contemporary of Sigmund Freud and Henry James. In fact, in Kerry McSweeney's judgment, "the introduction of a full-fledged psychological double into a realistic study of provincial life is by far the riskiest chance taken by George Eliot in Middlemarch" (90).

Nicholas Bulstrode, a shining example of provincial success, fancies himself "a banker, a Churchman, a public benefactor" (Bk. VI, Ch. 61, 428). The respect and power which he enjoys in Middlemarch somehow manages to blot out the disreputable practices from his past and, amazingly enough, even from his own memory. The narrator does not see Bulstrode as a hypocrite. He explains that

he was simply a man whose desires had been stronger than his theoretic beliefs, and who had gradually explained the gratification of his desires into satisfactory agreement with those beliefs. If this be hypocrisy, it is a process which shows itself occasionally in us all, to whatever confession we belong, and whether we believe in the future perfection of our race or in the nearest date fixed for the end of the world.
(Bk. VI, Ch. 61, 428)

In his own mind, Bulstrode actually has become the "model

citizen" he is believed to be by those who find him an individual to be reckoned with in Middlemarch society. Owner of the bank, husband of Harriet Vincy, promoter of the public good, Nicholas Bulstrode believes in his own image--that is, until the day when a man calling himself John Raffles, W.A.G., appears among the Middlemarchers.

The only man privy to Bulstrode's major act of fraud--the fraud which has made his public-spirited, wealthy-banker image possible, Raffles successfully dredged up Bulstrode's past--links him with the Dunkirk estate and forces him to look deeply into his own "heart of darkness." McSweeney evaluates this Raffles/Bulstrode characterization as the dark/light sides of the same individual. Her term "psychological double" would perhaps be more precisely designated "mirror image," which implies opposite external motion. Although the note in the flask and the various other Dickensian coincidences seem like "an unrealistic, implausible manipulation of plot for melodramatic purposes" (McSweeney 89), Eliot's convincing development of Raffles as a reasonable antagonist makes his presence in Middlemarch seem less contrived.

Kerry McSweeney believes that Bulstrode and Raffles represent Bulstrode's outer and hidden self, and that Raffles is the "personification of the morally polluted underside of [Bulstrode's] present life" (90). This statement applied to a chronologically pre-Freudian

novelist implies Eliot's anticipation of at least the general concepts labeled by the father of psychology as "id" and "subconscious." Conrad, whose writings succeeded Eliot's by several decades, based much of the conflict in his turn-of-the-century fiction on the tension between the inner and outer self and the light and dark sides of a man's personality. What George Eliot began with the Bulstrode/Raffles sequence was indeed daring for its time because the underlying concept of psychological duality was as yet unexplored in the world of the novel.

Not quite so innovative but at least as psychologically oriented is the depiction of the two sides of Dorothea Brooke. Ultimately, she is drawn as torn between Romantic Idealism and practical Realism. On the one hand, Dorothea envisions herself as a meaningful contributor to the world of research and scholarship. She views her future marriage to Casaubon as an ennobling and esoteric experience of which she will never grow weary. She believes him to be brilliant, stimulating, and perfect. Dorothea is willing to give up her very self and to become absorbed into her ideal--Pascal reincarnated--despite Celia's objection that she does not think that it can be "nice to marry a man with a great soul" (Bk. I, Ch. 6, 36). However, the worldly and practical Celia is quite different from the esoteric and idealistic Dorothea.

Beyond her idealism, Dorothea faces a very basic

problem--the fact that, unacceptable as it is for a woman of her time and place, she is gifted with a "theoretic mind." After accomplishing and accepting the first level of repression--that is, as a woman, being unable to pursue research and scholarship as a vocation on her own--Dorothea sees, as a likely alternative, the option of attaching herself to a "theoretic" man and of accepting the secondary role as helpmate or assistant. However, after many months of trying to live with an ideal, or idol, Dorothea begins to realize that her human side needs to touch another human being and that Casaubon, dried up as he is after spending so much time with the dead, has very little humanity left in him--certainly not enough to respond to Dorothea's needs. In addition to prompting her to marry Casaubon, her idealism moves her to seek better housing for the workers on Tipton Grange, to relinquish ownership of most of the family jewels to her sister Celia, and, eventually, to give up the estate conditionally left to her by her first husband.

On the other hand, although idealism remains a significant part of Dorothea's life, her other side learns to accept, and even to embrace, the inevitable existence of an imperfect world. Shocked by the reality of Casaubon's personality and frightened by the daily experience of being married to not only a cold and unfeeling man, but to a man who is jealous, suspicious, and vindictive,

Dorothea consciously lives out the commitment "until death do us part" with full knowledge that her naive idealism has created this entrapment for her and that the reality of the broken dream has to be played out to the end. Long after she ceases believing in Casaubon's Pascal image, she maintains her faith in his work. Dorothea, like the young Marian Evans, is fascinated by research which might reveal the "key" to unlock vistas of hidden truth.

By the time that George Eliot wrote Middlemarch, she personally had already searched for the "key" to religion, morality, interpersonal relations, and society's acceptance of a woman who was recognized as having the theoretical mind and the organizational skills of a man. After moving from participation in the organized religion of the High Church of England to the position of Wordsworthian pantheism and, eventually, to a belief in man as his own God, and after examining the philosophy of Spenser, Feuerbach, Spinoza, Comte, and others, and after fruitlessly searching for a way that she could be accepted for what she was by both her brother, Isaac, and by the literary/philosophical community, George Eliot had given up on finding the "key" to anything. U. C. Knoepfelmacher believes that George Eliot had a "profound suspicion" of whatever professed to have the "key" to the meaning of life. It is his opinion that "Lydgate's desire to trace all life to a single cellular archetype and Casaubon's

search for a single fountainhead for all mythologies" ("Fusing Fact" 51-52) must, therefore, be viewed ironically because the author herself had long since determined that the belief in the existence of any key to ultimate truth was, in fact, the greatest myth of all because there was no way either to define or contain absolutes.

* * * * *

Although Middlemarch anticipates the modern novel and reflects Wordsworthian principles, it is the most truly Victorian of Eliot's seven novels. Middlemarch deals with social reform, work ethic and vocation, the place of women in society, declining respect for the clergy, the rise of science, and the reality of everyday living. Dorothea actually walks among the poor workers at Tipton Grange to acquaint herself with their lives and circumstances. It is she who actually plans the design of the cottages which she asks her uncle to build for them. Sir James Chettam acknowledges Dorothea's "genius" in such matters--remarkable as it is "for a young lady"--and indicates that it is highly unlikely that the elder Mr. Brooke will invest money in such a project. Dorothea's response is outrage:

"Worth doing! yes indeed. . . . I think we deserve to be beaten out of our beautiful houses with a scourge of small cords--all of us who let tenants live in such sties as we see round us. Life in cottages might be happier than ours, if they were real houses fit for

human beings from whom we expect duties and affections." (Bk. I, Ch. 3, 19)

This concern of hers for the working classes continues throughout the novel. It is part of her on-going relationship with her uncle, of her role as mistress of Lowick Manor, and of her joint effort with Will Ladislaw to affect change by making good use of both the press and of Ladislaw's position in parliament.

Eliot's Victorian social consciousness also became visible through her endeavor to set her fictional work into a historical context. With some of Thackeray's best fiction as an example, Eliot incorporated into Middlemarch characters who both react to and involve themselves in political/historical issues such as the Test Act of 1828 and the Reform Bill of 1831-32. She makes reference to Lord John Russell, sponsor of the Reform Bill, and to the heated debates which took place about its passing both in the actual House of Commons and in the fictional town of Middlemarch. In addition to this, she involves Lydgate in a struggle for Medical Reform and depicts Mr. Brooke as wanting to keep himself "independent about Reform"--probably because of its being highly controversial--and to involve himself in causes which enjoy universal acceptance like "Negro Emancipation" and "Criminal Law." Brooke, who--according to the novel--plans to run for Parliament, obviously desires to keep himself out of any discussions or commitments on the various issues which are

likely to cost him votes (Bk. V, Ch. 46, 317).

Another thematic concept around which the Victorian novel was typically structured is the necessity and value of work. Middlemarch, according to Alan Mintz, deals with "professional work . . . [as] a significant means of self-realization." He believes that "the novel records the formation of this commitment, the roots of its motivation, and the course of its success or failure withstanding the threats posed by the solicitations of society and the contradictions of the self" (6). Susan M. Greenstein points out that Middlemarch focuses very sharply on the role of work and, in fact, provides a remarkably "sustained consideration of the subject of 'vocation,' the transformation of work into a calling." She further develops her idea by explaining that "the histories of Lydgate and Casaubon explore the incremental impress of society on this process" of elevating work to the level of vocation (487-88), while the plight of Dorothea dramatizes the frustration inherent in being kept from pursuing one's vocation because of the attitude toward women in nineteenth-century England.

Again typically Victorian, Eliot fixed the male characters in her novel on various levels of the social ladder. The place of each individual is directly determined by what he does, how well he does it, and how what he does is viewed by the other members of his society.

The women, on the other hand, derive their respective places in the social structure from the positions of their fathers, uncles, husbands, and patrons. The idealism of "vocation" is killed in Bulstrode, severely damaged in Lydgate, and fulfilled in Ladislaw because of both their personal choices and their respective series of interacting contacts with society as they attempt to bring their idealized goals to reality through involvement in day-to-day living. Bulstrode's idealism is smothered by greed and dishonesty; Lydgate's is tarnished by the pressures of money; and Ladislaw's becomes reality because he refuses to let anyone or anything keep him from doing what is really important for him.

Actually, Lydgate's problem begins when he arrives in Middlemarch. He gives evidence that he understands neither himself nor the society which surrounds him. Lydgate articulates the fact that he is determined to remain isolated both emotionally and socially. His vision of himself is one of a physician making contact with others only on the physical level. "But," Felicia Bonaparte explains, "his story is an ironic comment on the naive concept Lydgate has of human interaction." He obviously and erroneously believes that as cells can be kept separate from one another, so the various parts of his person can be compartmentalized and withheld from integrated human interaction. "Lydgate ha[s] not reckoned

with Bulstrode's ambition, with Rosamond's schemes, with the suspicious bias of provincial society, and never with those vulnerable points in his own nature that these and other external pressures would touch" (82). It would seem that because Lydgate studies the world through a microscope, he fails to see the grand scheme of things. His scientific, Darwinian world represents a segment of nineteenth-century society which accepts only what can be experientially and experimentally proven.

An additional social issue which dominated the nineteenth-century novel was the role of females. Victorian women--whether they were similar to the actual woman, Marian Evans Lewes, or to the fictional woman, Dorothea Brooke Casaubon Ladislaw or similar to neither of them--if they experienced any need to participate in intellectual, philosophical, literary, or artistic endeavors in any manner other than that of dabbler or hobbyist, either had a major confrontation with both family and society or were coerced to participate in such a way as to support ostensibly a male whose function it was to accomplish tasks related to these matters. As examples of how Victorian women coped with these restrictions, we have the real George Eliot who chose confrontation and the fictional Dorothea Brooke who, for the most part, selects conformity with contemporary mores. The text of Middlemarch reflects an ironic, if not a resentful,

narrative voice which tells us that "women were expected to have weak opinions" (Bk. I, Ch. 1, 3) and that "a man is seldom ashamed of feeling that he cannot love a woman so well when he sees a certain greatness in her: nature having intended greatness for men" (Bk. IV, Ch. 39, 269).

The novel characterizes Mr. Brooke as the benevolent old chauvinist. He must have reminded Eliot of numerous well-meaning Victorian gentlemen whose evaluation of women was similar to his. She has him say that he cannot let ladies meddle with his documents because "young ladies are too flighty" (Bk. I, Ch. 2, 11) and tell Mrs. Cadwallader, "Your sex are not thinkers, you know. . . . A man cares for nothing but truth" (Bk. I, Ch. 6, 35). In response to Sir James Chettam's pronouncement that "a woman is bound to . . . listen to those who know the world better than she does" (Bk. VIII, Ch. 72, 507), Eliot has the empty-headed, typical Victorian female, Celia, respond, "Men know better . . . except about babies" (Bk. VIII, Ch. 72, 508). Finally, when commenting on Mr. Brooke's stammering speech and Dorothea's eloquence, the narrator notes that "nature has sometimes made sad oversights" (Bk. IV, Ch. 39, 269)--undoubtedly a reference to the position of the theoretical and intellectually gifted Dorothea and to the situation of the estranged Marian Evans, who was not only at odds with many in the literary and philosophic communities and with her own family and early

acquaintances, but who also felt forced to adopt the identity of George Eliot in order to carry on with her life's work.

There is no denying that Middlemarch is a Victorian novel. However, simply labeling it such and neglecting to look beyond the restrictions of typical Victorian fiction is a refusal to appraise objectively the piece as a whole. We have explored this text as both a work of anticipation of the modern/psychological/Existential novel and as a product of its own times, but these two factors only explain Eliot's observation of the present and her keen sense of the future; in Middlemarch, as in most of her major fiction, she again demonstrates her literary and philosophical reliance on the past. Her most obvious, and probably most significant, backward look encompasses her introduction of certain Wordsworthian elements into Middlemarch which are much more subtle than those contained in her previous novels. Actually, there is very little description of landscape and nature in this work; the only vividly pictured areas in the town are Lowick Manor and Stone Court. Anderson notes that "it is striking that we know almost nothing of the appearance of Middlemarch itself" (147).

Bert G. Hornback believes that Wordsworthian influence in this particular novel is primarily related to the emphasis on feelings, emotions, values, and ideals. In

his judgment, Eliot treats feeling as Wordsworth did--that is, as a kind of knowledge in itself. He believes that the text demonstrates that, through feelings, an individual can find significant truth, which may lead to wisdom. Hornbeck sees Middlemarch as a text which emphasizes "moral imagination whose end is always 'to enlarge men's sympathies' with each other" (683). Will Ladislaw is an excellent example of how "moral imagination" functions. "He is associated with a certain set of aesthetic, imaginative, and philosophic values which, as they are shared with Dorothea, become a kind of morality" (Hornback 677). Among her comments relevant to Wordsworthian elements in Middlemarch, Barbara Hardy agrees that its emphasis on feeling is among the most important:

The presentation of feeling is continuous, running right through explicit commentary, behaviouristic description of action, movement, gesture, and the drama of human relations and inner life. Each chapter has its trajectory of strong feelings. ("Passions" 5-6)

Deborah Heller Roazen notes that Eliot's "ability to infuse ordinary reality with passion and drama is her great gift, as it was Wordsworth's" (415).

Idealism, which was at the heart of the Romantic movement, is presented by Eliot in Middlemarch as an integral part of both plot and character development. Several examples relevant to this statement come to mind: 1) Lydgate's idealism becomes tarnished by materialism; 2) Bulstrode's materialism is always an integral part of his

idealism; 3) Dorothea refuses to give up her idealistic beliefs simply because Casaubon, rather than being the reincarnation of Pascal, turns out to be someone whose blood is "all semicolons and parentheses" and whose dreams are filled with "footnotes" (Bk. I, Ch. 8, 47); 4) Casaubon's idealism turns him into a man who lives "too much with the dead" (Bk. I, Ch. 2, 9); and, although there are obviously others, 5) Will Ladislaw's idealism remains the guiding principle of both his artistic and political life and allows him to refuse Bulstrode's offer of money as a bribe with the statement, "My unblemished honor is important to me" (Bk. VI, Ch. 61, 431). Therefore, idealism plays a significant role in both the characterization of these individuals and their interaction of each with others as the tale unfolds. Hornbeck also analyzes Middlemarch in terms of idealism. He states that "two similar but uncongenial idealisms meet here: the moral ideal, to which Dorothea is devoted, and the aesthetic ideal, by which Will wants to live" (678).

Roazen basically agrees with these opinions. However, she identifies Eliot's debt to Wordsworth as going far beyond the realm of what I have called "influence." She believes that Eliot's relationship with Wordsworth grew either from or to the level of "spiritual-literary affinity" (411). Despite the lack of Wordsworthian pastoral imagery in Middlemarch--the Caleb Garth segments

aside, Roazen cites as primary to the issue of Wordsworth's "presence" in the text "the attitudes of the various characters in the novel toward the everyday details of the common routine" (413). She believes that this emphasis on day-to-day living helps to

define their moral stature and emotional maturity in a manner that can be seen as fundamentally Wordsworthian. That is, common life can be said to play an important and Wordsworthian role in Middlemarch to the extent to which the attitudes of different characters toward what can be broadly described as the common routine of daily living provide us with a reliable index of their essential natures; in Middlemarch as in many of George Eliot's other works, the more admirable characters are identifiable for their more Wordsworthian outlooks.

(413-414)

In Middlemarch, therefore, George Eliot continued to demonstrate her affinity with Wordsworth. This kinship is revealed in the subtlety of her treatment of moral and aesthetic issues, in her emphasis on everyday living, in her attitude toward idealism, and in her delicate message about the importance of feelings. If the landscape of nature is lacking, the more important "landscape of opinion" is not only present, but, as Anderson has determined, is "dominant" (147). Based on their attitudes, the "good Middlemarchers" seem to have their days "bound each to each by natural piety."

* * * * *

Throughout the novel, Eliot plays off the word "will." As characters exercise free will, they grow and

change. As they attempt to impose their wills on others, conflict occurs and the plot turns. Featherstone exercises his will by writing various last wills and testaments. Bonaparte recalls that

in the climactic scene, enacted on his deathbed, Featherstone demands his will--a pun undoubtedly . . . --be altered according to his last whim. The scene is not only typical but symbolic. . . . We begin to understand that it is the very essence of will that it be entirely inconsistent with itself in time, that at every moment it contradict its former and future identities. (99)

Likewise, Casaubon tries to force his will on Dorothea by writing objectionable restrictions into his will.

The freedom of will which Sartre praises in the character of Maggie Tulliver becomes in Middlemarch a seed of absurdity. In Mill on the Floss, despite the tragic ending, Maggie's constancy of will is praiseworthy. In Middlemarch, however, most references to "will" view it as inconstant and undependable. For example, one of the thematic elements of the text is the changing of wills--whether this indicates a legal document or an individual's power to choose. In the case of the latter, standards, values, attitudes, and even personal morality and life goals vary as characters exercise their freedom either to adopt or reject them. This is the inherent absurdity of man's freedom which is demonstrated in the novel.

Is Middlemarch a study about the power and strength of will? Does George Eliot believe that man is really free; or does she, as Bedient suggests, build a

deterministic philosophy into its text? The answer may lie in her naming of Ladislav. He represents man's freedom to be himself; he is not bound by the limits of Middlemarch. He represents hope in the future and confidence in the present. Ladislav is a doer, an involved person, whom the Existentialists would describe as "engage." I doubt very much that Eliot selected the name "Will" at random.

But the novel is not built around Will Ladislav; it is structured around Dorothea Brooke, a woman whose name signifies quiet and constant motion toward a goal. The motion of Dorothea's life represents an on-going search for her destiny and its gradual fulfilment in time. Hornback explains that

as the novel progresses, Dorothea begins to see more clearly both the world and her own place in it. She is disillusioned in her dream of Casaubon and in their marriage and begins to assert that strength of character which has been lost--hidden--in the lighter tissues of her own fantasies. (675-76)

Knoepflmacher sees her as "a seeker who must renounce her quest for knowledge, a voice whose language remains simple and unadorned." He believes that "she incarnates the 'idealistic in the real' and . . . epitomizes the view of form adopted in the novel built around her" ("Fusing Fact" 63). The text itself describes her as a "Christian Antigone--[a] sensuous force controlled by spiritual passion" (Bk. II, Ch. 19, 132).

Into these two characters, George Eliot infused the major Victorian, Wordsworthian, and modern/Existentialist

elements of the text. According to Knoepfmacher, in her attempts to define men's thoughts after a truer order than Lydgate's, George Eliot created a new form--an epic that is not an epic, a history that is a fiction, a work of prose that can and must be read like a poem. ("Fusing Fact" 68)

Just as "when one sees a perfect woman, one never thinks of her attributes--one is conscious of her presence" (Bk. V, Ch. 43, 300), when one encounters a truly great novel--perhaps the best created by its author--one is more conscious of the whole than of any of its parts. Middlemarch indeed represents a "new form"; it was a form later used by James and Conrad and perfected by the greatest novelists of twentieth-century.

Daniel Deronda

T. S. Eliot, The Cocktail Party

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uncommon in their talents and mission--like herself and like Daniel--needed to live unconventional lives in order to be fulfilled and satisfied.

In both Marble Faun and Daniel Deronda, the authors finally --in all senses of the word--attempted to resolve the overriding puzzle of their personal and individual existences. All of his adult life, Hawthorne had been haunted by the theological concept of election of the few; the Catholic attitude toward forgiveness of sin or conversion of the sinner, dealt with in his last novel, either resolved or totally confused this lifelong query for him. In the same vein, virtually all of George Eliot's fiction is semi-autobiographical, but at no time did Eliot really attempt to justify her own unconventional life style and her sense of mission so completely as she did in Daniel Deronda. R. T. Jones raises and answers this very question regarding Eliot's underlying reason for creating the fictional presentation of Daniel Deronda:

Is it the strangeness, the unaverage quality of her own destiny that George Eliot is trying to match, or approach, in her last novel? The only limitation of the world she portrays in her earlier novels is that it could not accommodate her own life. In Daniel Deronda she seems to be making a deliberate attempt, which does not entirely succeed, to see clearly and wholly a world that is recognizably governed by the same familiar laws as that of Middlemarch, but where at the same time, as in reality, uncommon people can find or make their strange and rare destinies, under the influence of events that can sometimes seem not to be entirely accidental. Perhaps that is why we find . . . so much evidence of how desperately hard she tried: the final challenge of her art was to create an imagined reality

comparable in fullness with the reality she had herself experienced. (115-16)

It is very difficult to define exactly what George Eliot's "reality" was. As I have stated in previous chapters, Marian Evans Lewes/George Eliot was herself a summary of the past, a reflection of the present, and an indication of the future. Her intellectual mix of theology, philosophy, culture, and letters, her imaginative or emotive creative powers, her personal moral and social consciousness, her sense of mission toward the improvement of the human condition, and her willingness to live outside the realm of the "ordinary" all indicate a unique individual, a woman who defied the divisions of time and category and who, by her very existence, demanded to be viewed simply as herself.

In her last novel, Eliot again blended Wordsworth with Hegel, Victorian social consciousness and family heritage with Existential isolation and rootlessness, simple intellectual judgments with complex exposition of motivational factors, and typical nineteenth-century Victorian literary devices with a somewhat awkward attempt at what the modern novelists call stream of consciousness. Daniel Deronda is highly symbolic, heavily psychological, and--from first page to last--subtly ironic. More uninhibited and less cautious than any of her other novels, Deronda best represents Eliot's eclecticism as she burst the boundaries of the present--without rejecting all

that she saw as good in both past and present--and brought together all that, in her judgment, should live on into the future. Here Eliot also attempted to justify not only her own unusual life and the unconventional style of her thought and writing but also the fictional life of the Messianic Deronda and the necessity for tolerance and understanding on the part of "ordinary" individuals toward those special human beings whose destiny it is--whether self-determined or superimposed--to be different.

Although each of the clerics in the Clerical Scenes, Dinah Morris of Adam Bede, and Middlemarch's Dorothea Brooke all demonstrate a sense of dedication to a cause, there is no character in all of Eliot's works whose mission is as all-consuming and extraordinary as that of Daniel Deronda. Joan Bennett tells us simply that Daniel's "problem, like Dorothea's, is to find in the modern world an employment to satisfy his aspiration to serve mankind" (186). Part of Daniel's problem with planning the future is his lack of knowledge about his past. In his early teen years, Deronda, knowing that he is the ward of Sir Hugo Mallinger, seeks to determine his natural parentage. He indicates to Sir Hugo that he does indeed "want to be an Englishman," but that he also wants "to understand other points of view" (Bk. II, Ch. 16, 164).

Raised as a "gentleman's son," Daniel attended Cambridge where he occupied rooms with Hans Meyrick, a

young man of Jewish heritage. When Hans injured his eye, Daniel helped him with his studies. Because of this, Meyrick's family took Deronda in and treated him as one of their own. Experiencing the closeness of the family of his Jewish friend, Daniel's need to know who he is and where he has come from increases his determination to search for his natural parents. Relevant to this, Bernard J. Paris states that despite his aristocratic British upbringing,

what Deronda lacked, of course, was an identification with a special social group, cause, or tradition. And lacking this, he lacked a center of self, a core of prejudices and cherished interests which would define his identity, establish his goals, and channel his thoughts, feelings and actions. (Experiments 206-07)

The narrator tells us that while Daniel was a student at the university, he found it difficult to plan and define his future. The voice explains how Deronda longs to have "the sort of apprenticeship to life which would not shape him too definitely, and rob him of that choice that might come from free growth" (Bk. II, Ch. 16, 161). Daniel somehow knows that he has more to do with his life than to live it simply as an ordinary aristocratic Englishman; and early in his adulthood, Daniel determines that the discovery of his natural heritage will somehow shape the purpose of his existence.

Although Graham Martin raises the issue that it is generally accepted that "Deronda's shadowiness of character . . . constitutes the novel's greatest weakness," he believes--as I do--that the elusive and almost mystical

aura which surrounds Daniel Deronda seems integral to the text.⁷ Martin defends Eliot's sketchy portrayal of Deronda by pointing out that

unlike anybody else in his world, [Daniel] is a man in search of his identity. Withdrawn, meditative, without any of the settled purposes or desires which make the basis of predominantly 'social' characterization, Deronda is a wanderer, a man in the making, whose energies only crystallize at the very end of the novel. (148)

Therefore, it is only fitting that the character who spends most of the novel attempting to define himself should not be clearly delineated in earlier chapters by his creator. After all, in the Existentialist world, where Eliot was becoming more and more at home, a man--in this case the fictional Daniel Deronda--determines his own essence; and Eliot, by creating the illusion that Daniel defined his own purpose at the end, followed the Existentialist principle.

Deronda's guardian, Sir Hugo, oversees his young ward's education. The older gentleman believes that for Daniel, who sincerely wants to use his life to make the world a better place, politics will be a good career. To this suggestion Daniel responds, "'I cannot persuade myself to look at politics as a profession. . . . I don't want to make a living out of opinions . . . especially out of borrowed opinions.'" Sir Hugo, who had Daniel's best interest in mind, informed him that

"the business of the country must be done--her Majesty's Government carried on. . . . And it never could be, my boy, if everybody looked at politics as if

they were prophecy, and demanded an inspired vocation. If you are to get into Parliament, it won't do to sit still and wait for a call either from heaven or constituents." (Bk. IV, Ch. 33, 346)

In retrospect, the ironic overtones contained in this conversation are fairly obvious. Sir Hugo, who habitually undervalues birth, stands firm in the belief that Deronda should serve his country. Deronda, for whom heritage is a major factor, refrains from a commitment to Parliament because that will limit him to working exclusively for England; and before he can become a part of a political movement, he is determined to discover his native origins. Therefore, although when this conversation takes place Daniel and Sir Hugo seem to be opposed to one another, as the story unfolds, it is revealed that the guardian and his ward are really envisioning the same direction for young Deronda's career path. The only problem with Sir Hugo's logic is his assumption that Daniel should act as if he were born an Englishman when Daniel is experiencing an overwhelming need to know for certain the nationality of his birth; and indeed, when that discovery is made, Daniel proceeds to "go about the business of [his] country," as Sir Hugo has advised him.

Despite Sir Hugo's caution that waiting for "a call" is an act of futility, Daniel Deronda continues to seek a sign. This sign, when it comes, reveals for Daniel his mission in life and is both temporally and psychologically bound to his discovery of his Jewish origins. Alan Mintz

describes this awakening to the truth about his roots as Daniel's initial experience with total participation in an

organic community and fellowship. Most significantly, Deronda's new identity affords a stage for action on the largest possible scale: not Dorothea's unhistoric acts of kindness, but nothing less than a messianic mission on behalf of an entire people. (162)

It is easy to discount Daniel Deronda as a derranged Romantic with a megalascope savior complex whose weakness is his inability to comprehend the fact that no single man can make an impact on the human condition and that attempting to establish Israel as a Jewish state is a cause that has been unsuccessful since Old Testament times. However, R. T. Jones warns us that

we have to be on our guard against the prevalent eccentricity of the age we live in: our predisposition to disbelieve in the validity of any great cause, any aim beyond the limitations of our own lives, that could give a meaning to the lives of those who devoted themselves to it. So many heroic aspirations--social, political and intellectual--have in the last hundred years been fulfilled at enormous cost of self-sacrifice and suffering, and have begun to turn sour as soon as they were achieved. So much blood has been shed to save humanity, and we see humanity, to all appearances, no more saved than it ever was; so many heroes have laid down their lives, as the saying goes, to so little purpose as far as the enrichment of life is concerned--that we have reason to decline any invitation to heroic action, to question the motives of heroes, and to doubt whether any vast enterprise can really be taken seriously by a sane man. (112)

Thus goes the "common scepticism of our time." Jones asks readers of Daniel Deronda to "judge a work of art from a centrally human standpoint" and to remind themselves that "good causes [do] exist" and that they can indeed give a "sense of direction . . . to the lives of those actively

engaged in them, whether they succeed or not" (113). The fact remains that once Daniel Deronda resolves the problem of viewing himself as, what Paris calls a "rootless cosmopolitan" (Experiments 209), he has the opportunity to lead the life of an epic hero. He no longer suffers the pain of being torn between what he should do and what he wants to do and between his personal and social obligations; all of these blend into a unified goal which offers Daniel motivation, direction, companionship, and fulfillment.

This concept of messianic mission and fulfillment, which reflects the influence of Hegel--even indirectly through Feuerbach--fills the pages of Daniel Deronda. The protagonist of Eliot's last novel meets the criteria for Hegel's world-historical individual. Stone defines this individual as

a man who, at a time of need among his people or in a period of social decline when a new course of action must be taken, arises in order to accomplish 'that for which the time [is] ripe.' Such men are themselves subjects of the world spirit, which directs its future aim (the spread of freedom, in Hegel's view) through them: they thus demonstrate the power of will while remaining passive in the service of necessity. (191)

Stone further suggests that this "world-historic" figure exemplifies both the classical and the romantic hero.

Numerous critical comments link Daniel Deronda with the Romantic Era. Although among Romantic influences on the works of George Eliot the Wordsworthian tradition dominates, Stone recognizes the musician, Julius Klesmer, a

German Jew, as a spokesman for Shelley's definition of the "power of the artistic genius" (241). Shelley, of course, believed that the artist contributed as much to the shaping of an age as did the legislators. Eliot has Klesmer explain to Gwendolen that a true artist views "music and the drama as a higher vocation in which [one] would strive after excellence" (Bk. III, Ch. 23, 232). Klesmer declares that Art is his mistress and that those who offer their lives in the service of Art, "serve her by helping every fellow-servant" (Bk. III, Ch. 23, 234). For both the real Shelley and the fictional Klesmer, Art was a goddess at whose altar the true artist gladly worshipped.

Stone comments that "neither Shelley's belief in Necessity nor Eliot's acceptance of the law of consequences could destroy their idealism where the future was concerned" (198). Actually, this hope in the future, which the Romantics sought through idealism, is very similar to the hope in the future which the Existentialists desired to achieve through the altruistic acts of individuals who dedicated themselves to the service of humanity. In her last novel, George Eliot allowed Daniel's "Shelleyan idealism to bear fruit" (Stone 198) even as the author herself, an artist of serious consequence, attempted to bear fruit through her fictional expression.

Although she never indicates whether Daniel's quest satisfies his expectations of what he hopes to accomplish,

her fiction implies that he enjoys an on-going sense of fulfillment in the planning and initial execution of his pursuit. To a certain extent, her achievement suffices to indicate Eliot's stand on the importance of idealism and the necessity of following whatever is perceived as one's raison d'[^]être. Daniel indeed recognizes the force of his own magnetic personality and perceives in it a haunting message with regard to his not-yet-discovered life's purpose. Stone links this awareness not only with the text of Daniel Deronda but also with a statement which Eliot, through this particular novel, is making about herself. He writes that Daniel's consciousness of his own difference from others and his own special talents and his willingness to do whatever might be necessary to spend his life using those talents for the good of others "is indispensable not just to the plot of Daniel Deronda but to Eliot's sense of her own mission." He also likens Daniel's discovery that he is a Jew and a salvific leader to Eliot's discovery that she was a novelist and even a preserver of Romantic idealism. Stone continues:

In Judaism Eliot observed the triumph of the Romantic principle: in the survival of a nation through the power of shared memories and feelings, Eliot saw a Darwinian justification for the survival of the idealism of . . . Wordsworth. (243)

Daniel Deronda attests to the power of the Romantic imagination. Klesmer supports Shelleyan principles of the value of art, and the low-born Daniel represents

Wordsworth's theme of the peasant rising to leadership among his people.

There is an inherent irony in the background and heritage of Daniel Deronda. Raised as the ward of a wealthy and prominent political figure, Daniel has been properly educated and expected to follow in the tradition of Sir Hugo by becoming a leader in English society. However, Daniel searches until he finds that he is not only low-born, but Jewish. Then, only after he has established his ignoble beginnings, can he rise as a leader and allow his idealism to direct his altruistic goal of securing a fatherland for his people. Only after Daniel has discovered that his birthright endows him with no rights at all does he perceive that his life's purpose will be to secure the right of a homeland for his fellow Jews. According to Jerome Beaty, he finds "in his racial past not . . . bonds, but opportunities, a role, a social faith and order, a passional fulfillment" (174).

Jean-Paul Sartre would define Daniel's process of becoming a leader as working out his own essence. Actually, there is a close relationship between Wordsworth's idealism, Hegel's World-Historical individual, and Sartre's concept of the growth of the Existentialist toward responsible action and objectivity--what Eliot called altruism. In the novel, the narrator informs the reader that "Deronda's conscience included sensibilities

beyond the common, enlarged by his early habit of thinking himself imaginatively into the experience of others" (Bk. VI, Ch. 41, 465). Speaking to this same issue, Bernard J. Paris makes a statement about Daniel which not only reflects the narrator's evaluation of Deronda's ability to step outside of himself but also parallels Sartre's definition of humanism for the Existentialist. Paris insightfully notes that Deronda's "ability to see himself and the world from points of view other than his own was the source of much of his moral nobility, leading him to act generously in his relations with [others]" (Experiments 205). In "Existentialism is a Humanism," Sartre explains that although man is necessarily subjective, he develops as a human being by attempting to assume an objective standpoint. He indicates that

it is in projecting and losing himself beyond himself that he makes [himself] exist; and, on the other hand, it is by pursuing transcendent aims that he himself is able to exist. Since man is thus self-surpassing, and can grasp objects only in relation to his self-surpassing, he is himself the heart and center of his transcendence. There is no other universe except the human universe, the universe of human subjectivity.

(310)

Paris's indication of Deronda's ability to step outside of himself to view both himself and others indicates that, by Sartrean standards, Daniel can be viewed as an Existentialistic humanist.

Other viewpoints from which Daniel Deronda can be considered an Existentialist hero include those of

rootlessness and isolation. R. T. Jones notes that "most of George Eliot's novels begin by creating the place in which the action is to pass," and he calls this one an exception. Jones writes that Daniel Deronda "opens with a chance encounter in a place remote from the scenes of the action that follows" (97). It is a tale about a lack of roots. Although Eliot's narrator is referring to Gwendolen Harleth when he makes his statement about the importance of roots, the content of his speech could well be applied to Daniel:

A human life, I think, should be well rooted in some spot of a native land, where it may get the love of tender kinship for the face of the earth, for the labours men go forth to, for the sounds and accents that haunt it, for whatever will give that early home a familiar unmistakable difference amidst the future widening of knowledge: a spot where the definiteness of early memories may be inwrought with affection, and kindly acquaintance with all neighbours, even to the dogs and donkeys, may spread not by sentimental effort and reflection, but as a sweet habit of blood.

(Bk. I, Ch. 3, 16)

This "native land," this "definiteness of early memories," and this necessary "sweet habit of blood" has indeed been lacking in the life of Daniel Deronda. Although Sir Hugo has provided Daniel with ample affection and care, Deronda is nevertheless a "stranger" in the Mallinger household. Throughout most of the novel, Daniel experiences feelings of isolation and insecurity because he does not know about his natural parentage. Only when he finds his roots, does Daniel Deronda seize the moment and plan his future.

This raises a question as to whether Daniel's

decision is, as Stone evaluates it, "thrust upon" him (243), or whether Daniel chooses it freely. Actually, Eliot makes it very clear that this "messianic mission" on which Deronda decides to embark is a goal of his own making. His words leave little room for a critical evaluation which simply labels Daniel's decision as deterministic. In the text, Eliot has Deronda tell Kalonymos: "I shall call myself a Jew. . . . I hold that my first duty is to my own people, and if there is anything to be done towards restoring or perfecting their common life, I shall make that my vocation" (Bk. VIII, Ch. 60, 663). Strong "I-statements" like these seem to indicate that Deronda sees himself as a free agent whose discovery of his past allows him to make an all-encompassing commitment to the future.

In addition to Daniel's rootlessness, isolation, and freedom of choice, another important characteristic which associates Daniel Deronda with not only Existentialist novels in particular but with the modern novel in general is its emphasis on psychological elements. As stated earlier, this novel seems not to have the typical "Eliot beginning." There seems to be no setting--no town in which the novel is to take place. Despite whatever might seem different about the opening chapters of Daniel Deronda, they do have a common link with her other texts. Contrary to Jones's beliefs, the novel does, in fact, open by presenting the reader with the place in which the story

will unfold; but rather than Hayslope or St. Oggs or Middlemarch, the locus is the mind of Daniel Deronda--where the most significant action of the plot will transpire.

This is actually a novel about how the mind of Daniel works: how he evaluates himself; how he focuses on the needs of others; and how he chooses action and inaction, depending on the circumstances. It is in these opening lines, according to Felicia Bonaparte, that Eliot

establishes striking images, symbols, and situations--Gwendolen gambling, Gwendolen kissing her image in the glass, Gwendolen coldly selling the necklace, and Gwendolen chastened by Deronda's measuring gaze and his return of the necklace--that become recurring motifs . . . (233)

both within the external plot and within the mind of Daniel Deronda. Although Deronda, the central character, is often criticized as a "shadowy figure," an "insufficiently delineated character," a "weak representation" of Eliot's ability as a novelist, I believe that she deliberately chose to create Daniel in exactly that manner because it is his spiritual powers rather than his physical being and activity which are more important. In the gambling casino where the story opens, it is Gwendolen Harleth who is involved in external activities; Daniel, on the other hand, although he functions as a formidable presence, is primarily thinking, evaluating, and judging. To the casual observer, this opening passage and indeed many subsequent sections of the text might seem to present Deronda as weak; however, the nobility of character which surfaces in the

end only comes forth because throughout his life Daniel has put himself on hold, so to speak, waiting for information about his past to help him move toward his future. Because of his selfless motivation, that refusal to act can indeed be viewed as strength rather than weakness.

Daniel uses his power of mind and spirit throughout the text to play "the triple role of confessor, absolver, and teacher," as Elizabeth A. Daniels describes it. She believes that "with rudimentary psychotherapy Deronda attempts to cure . . . Gwendolen . . . [who is] obsessed with her own sense of guilt" (34). Daniels sees Deronda as "an atypical male, the idealised opposite of a Victorian male egoist." She thinks that it is because of his being different from other men of his time that he is "capable of standing aside from the system to see what is going on and offering [Gwendolen] sympathetic but disinterested advice" (33).

Even Grandcourt and Gwendolen, earthy as they may seem, are more significant as "wills" than they are as physical beings. Their marriage begins and continues as a psychological battleground on which, as Felicia Bonaparte points out, Grandcourt's highest gratification comes from his ability to subject a strong will like Gwendolen's to his own. She states that Grandcourt's will, "in its ultimate perversion, . . . craves not only such complete power but the opposition which makes the subsequent

victory all the more exhilarating" (100). His attraction to and ultimate choice of Gwendolen Harleth as a wife really has very little to do with her attractiveness as a woman or any feelings of affection which he may have toward her. It is obvious that Grandcourt selects Miss Harleth because of her willfulness, because of the challenge he will experience in subduing the strongest female he can find. However, this does not mean that we should view Gwendolen as a victim. She, too, is thrilled at the chance of opposing the strongest-willed male of her acquaintance.

Gwendolen's acceptance of marriage with Grandcourt is motivated by as equally unworthy a set of reasons as is his proposal. Miss Harleth, whom Calvin Bedient describes as a gambler who thoroughly enjoys "dicing for what she wants at the table of life" (65), sees in a partnership with Grandcourt the challenge of a living wager, a battle of wits and wills, which she can hardly refuse.

Eliot left no doubt about Gwendolen's fierce virginity. Paris notes that her sexual frigidity was primarily caused by her unwillingness to submit to anyone other than herself. He comments that "ironically, one of the things that had made Grandcourt tolerable to her as a lover was the absence of ardor and eagerness in his attentions" (Experiments 234). Miss Harleth/Mrs. Grandcourt undertakes a "bloodless contest of wills"

(Bonaparte 98) against her husband from which neither of them can emerge victorious. Daniels notes that Gwendolen is "deeply injured by her experience with Grandcourt" and by "her immoral decision to get married" (31). Even after Grandcourt's death, because of the tremendous guilt which she experiences, Gwendolen cannot count herself as having won. Since she has often willed him dead, when Grandcourt actually dies, Gwendolen believes herself responsible because she judges her own will to be so powerful that it could, in fact, have acted as the instrument of her husband's death. The guilt which she suffers after that fatal boating accident on the Italian lake indicates the influence which Daniel has on her in his attempt to draw her forth from her selfish world. Although Daniel consoled her by explaining that she has no part in Grandcourt's death, her guilt--unfounded as it is--is a sign of Gwendolen's motion away from her formerly subjective world. In the light of this sense of guilt, Alan Mintz is perhaps too harsh in his belief that "Gwendolen's ambition stands as an emblem of pure will, a metaphor of mobility stripped of all pretense of benevolent intention" (151).

In Daniel Deronda, George Eliot's plot, characterization, and style all point to the modern novel. Alan Mintz believes that the magnitude of Eliot's last novel and the scope of characters portrayed in it are such that they "can obviously no longer be contained by the

premodern novel, which usually confines itself to the empirical world of middle-class relations" (162). In Bennett's judgment, Eliot's

conception of . . . Gwendolen's nature needed the spacious treatment that Henry James or Conrad ensured for themselves by limiting the interest of a long novel to the development of a single human situation. Thus, besides being the greatest English novelist in her own time, George Eliot points forward to subsequent developments in the art of fiction. (196)

In her last novel, Eliot made a rough attempt at the primarily modern stylistic technique known as "stream of consciousness." Although *Deronda's* consciousness is central to the text, the novelist uses the "stream" in a manner later developed and refined by Proust and employed by subsequent writers of fiction. At the beginning of Book II, Eliot used Gwendolen's first meeting with Grandcourt at an archery meet to demonstrate how a writer could interweave with the external dialogue between two characters a simultaneous thought process, occurring in the mind of one of the speakers, which was either contrary or extraneous to the conversation itself. Relative to this, Joan Bennett states that within the chapter which recounts the events of the archery contest,

George Eliot indicates the stream of Gwendolen's consciousness as it flows on beneath the conversation between [Grandcourt and Miss Harleth]. Their talk is polite and superficial, a pretended attempt to get to know one another by talking lightly about tastes and pastimes. . . . But while they talk of archery and hunting she is thinking of the impression she is making on him and of what it would be like to be the wife of such a man. The technique is a little clumsy;

the conversation is interrupted by parentheses that record her thoughts. . . . Though modern writers have developed techniques that produce the required effect more economically and more subtly, the recognition that such reflections as these often accompany a conversation that reveals nothing of them, implies a more complex conception of character-drawing than was usual in Victorian fiction. (190)

For example, Gwendolen is speaking:

"Well, in general, I think whatever is agreeable is called folly. But you have not left off hunting, I hear."

(Pause, wherein Gwendolen recalled what she had heard about Grandcourt's position, and decided that he was the most aristocratic-looking man she had ever seen.)

"One must do something."

"And do you care about the turf?--or is that among the things you have left off?"

(Pause, during which Gwendolen thought that a man of extremely calm, cold manners might be less disagreeable as a husband than other men, and not likely to interfere with his wife's preferences.)

"I run horse now and then; but I don't go in for the thing as some men do. Are you fond of horses?"

"Yes, indeed. I never like my life so well as when I am on horseback, having a great gallop. I think of nothing. I only feel myself strong and happy."

(Pause, wherein Gwendolen wondered whether Grandcourt would like what she said, but assured herself that she was not going to disguise her tastes.) (Bk. II, Ch. 11, 98-99)

Despite the awkwardness of this early attempt at "stream of consciousness," Eliot achieves a portrait of Gwendolen which is far more effective than a retelling of her thoughts in another portion of the novel would have been.

Gwendolen Harleth functions not only as one of George Eliot's dark females, but as a foil for the character of Daniel Deronda. As selfish and egotistical as Gwendolen is, Daniel is equally unselfish and altruistic. His life is defined by the company he keeps: Gwendolen, Sir Hugo, Mirah Lapidoth, Mordecai, and eventually his long-lost mother, Leonora. Daniel is surrounded by strong individuals who represent--both realistically and idealistically--the plight of minorities in nineteenth-century Western Europe.

The two minority groups most obviously championed in Daniel Deronda are females and Jews. Although some have attempted to present Marian Evans/George Eliot as a feminist, her general beliefs would argue to the contrary. Eliot believed in the difference between the sexes and did not revere women who attempted to match physical strength with men. Her simple request of society with regard to a woman's place in the world was one which merely asked for equal acceptance of talent, equal respect for intellectual powers, and equal opportunities for education and participation in decision making. Her frustration at the behavior of her contemporary Victorian peers is blatantly expressed in the doleful words which Deronda's mother speaks to him: "'You are not a woman. You may try--but you can never imagine what it is to have a man's force of genius in you, and yet to suffer the slavery of being a

girl'" (Bk. VII, Ch. 52, 576).

What George Eliot attempted to do in many of her novels--particularly in Daniel Deronda--was to express concern for the emotional, moral, and intellectual development of women. Her work offered a new theme to the existing literature of the time, which Daniels claims was thematically dominated by a "quest for male selfhood." She identifies this theme as the "central controlling literary image of the period, balanced against the notion of the 'angel in the house', the Victorian wife who minister[ed] to her husband, her children, and her household" (28).

Eliot's life speaks for itself with regard to her attitude toward keeping a home, cooking for a husband, and caring for children. Her letters speak lovingly about all of these womanly concerns. However, what George Henry Lewes gave her--along with the role of helpmate and mother--was respect, support, and encouragement regarding her career ventures. He proofread her copy, kept her financial records, communicated with her publisher, shared her research, and applauded her literary endeavors. The voice of Leonora Alcharisi was not meant to admonish Lewes or his children. Undoubtedly, it was directed at her brother, Isaac, the literary community, various intellectual and philosophical circles, and Victorian society in general. In addition to this, Eliot probably meant for Leonora to speak to other women, who considered hopeless any attempt

to flourish on the same intellectual level as men. To them she hoped to send the message that they must give up the sentimentality into which they had fallen, become realists, and demand the education which --for the most part--had been denied them.

Leonora not only resents being born a female, she views her Jewish heritage as a bondage. In her explanation as to why she gave Daniel to Sir Hugo to raise, she indicates that she hoped to relieve him "from the bondage of having been born a Jew" (Bk. VII, Ch. 51, 572) and that she wanted him to be reared as an English gentleman. She continues:

"Every woman is supposed to have the same set of motives, or else to be a monster. I am not a monster, but I have not felt exactly what other women feel--or say they feel, for fear of being thought unlike others. When you reproach me in your heart for sending you away from me, you mean that I ought to say I felt about you as other women say they feel about their children. I did not feel that. I was glad to be freed from you."

(Bk. VII, Ch. 51, 573-74)

What she did--that is, to insulate Daniel from the bondage of Jewish separateness--in a strange sort of recoil, worked in reverse. Daniel's lingering questions about his heritage act as a wall between him and Sir Hugo, between him and his English peers, and between him and his Jewish friends. However, the eventual revelations which Leonora makes to Daniel, save him from a life of isolation; and despite the fact that his mother remains an unrescued and unredeemed soul, her final act has a salvific

effect on the son she once gave away.

The ghastly vision which Leonora shares with Daniel about the lot of Jews is then contrasted in Daniel's mind with the prophetic vision of Mordecai. With his speech at the Philosopher's Club, Mordecai has inspired Daniel regarding the greatest need of the Jewish people--the need for a homeland. His words employ the rhetoric of a visionary:

"Revive the organic centre: let the unity of Israel which has made the growth and form of its religion be an outward reality. Looking towards a land and a polity, our dispersed people in all the ends of the earth may share the dignity of a national life" (484). . . . "There is a store of wisdom among us to found a new Jewish polity, grand, simple, just, like the old--a republic where there is equality of protection, an equality which shone like a star on the forehead of our ancient community" (487). . . . "Let the torch of visible community be lit! Let the reason of Israel disclose itself in a great outward deed, and let there be another great migration, another choosing of Israel to be a nationality whose members may still stretch to the ends of the earth" (488). (Bk. V, Ch. 41)

George Eliot was again ahead of her time with regard to her belief in Jewish nationalism. The Zionist movement was not founded until 1900, twenty-four years after the novel was published. According to Joan Bennett, Eliot "knew nothing, and apparently foresaw nothing, of the international problems that would follow in [the movement's] train." She simply believed that "the Jewish race, and every race, had a special contribution to make to the progress of mankind" (186).

In a letter to John Blackwood in 1877, John Brown

wrote: "George Eliot's [works] I don't rank as Novels, but as second Bibles. . . . You never think or feel you are reading fiction, but biography . . . and biography of people into whose minds and hearts you can enter with the intensest sympathy" (Bloom 220). Daniel Deronda is a simultaneous biography of two incarnations: one good, one evil. It is also a history of two kinds of worlds: one ideal, one real. The significant factor that makes all of this presentable in a unified whole is that good, evil, ideal, and real interdepend upon one another for their very existence.

In his article, "Daniel Deronda: A Conversation," Henry James has Constantius, who finds fault with the novel, arguing with Pulcheria, who defends it. Constantius believes that Daniel is "a failure--a brilliant failure. . . . The author meant . . . to make a faultless human being" (167). However, Constantius does allow that in the novel "there is a vast amount of life." He adds that "the book is full of the world," to which Pulcheria responds, "It is full of beauty and sagacity" (176). Indeed, the "sagacity" with which the novel is replete is a wisdom that presents unity in polarity and demands equality among all human beings. As far as "failure" is concerned, the main critical objection to Daniel Deronda cites the "Jewish portion" as being superimposed. That implies that Mordecai, Mirah, Leonora, and Daniel's idealistic mission

are all extraneous to the essence of the plot. Recent thinking simply does not accept this response. However, it would seem that if this novel is unified at all, it is unified by contrast. Graham Martin states that

the contrast between its two main characters provides the key to the novel, and through their relationship George Eliot juxtaposes two social images, one actual in the life we see Gwendolen Harleth living, the other potential in the aspirations which Daniel Deronda tries to fulfil. (141)

Joan Bennett is satisfied with the unity of the text. She simply states that as far as she is concerned, "everything in the novel is successfully related to everything else" (183).

Perhaps George Eliot's last novel represented more of herself than did any of her other works. She clearly spoke her feelings about the plight of women through Leonora; she communicated her vision regarding the treatment of the Jews and the reprehensible attitude which higher social orders took toward minorities; she presented women who possessed great potential for growth and wholly selfish individuals who found within themselves the capacity for amendment; she reaffirmed the fact that there was a place in Victorian society for Romantic idealism; and she assured her readers that great world-historic movements could still become reality. Bernard J. Paris concludes that

George Eliot has given Deronda what she conceives to be the ideal human lot. For him, love and duty, personal affections and social sentiments, lie along

the same path; his discovery of his Jewish identity at once gives him a heroic vocation and imperative duties and makes it possible for him to marry the woman he loves, Mirah. Once he discovers his true social identity all the elements of his life fall into place. (Experiments 209)

This, of course, was the fate that the novelist sincerely wanted for herself. Daniel represented a wish-fulfilment for George Eliot.

Despite critical thought to the contrary, the "Jewish portion" of Daniel Deronda seems not only central to the plot, but integral to the theme. The lessons which both Gwendolen and Daniel learn are essentially tied to the humanism and nationalism preached by Mordecai. The plight of the Israelites is a plight of isolation, of what Leonora calls "separateness"; and, in fine, Deronda is a novel about being alone and being rescued from that aloneness. Eliot's last novel argues that man is isolated until he--like Gwendolen--finds someone who will advise disinterestedly and forgive absolutely or until he--like Daniel--focuses on his mission after searching for and finding what is really important in life. And what people could Eliot choose as better examples of rootlessness and wandering than the Israelites? If Israelites are those who search for a homeland and seek the protection and encouragement of their brothers, then, symbolically and psychologically, says Harold Bloom, in the eyes of George Eliot, "we are all Israelites" (220).

Chapter VII

Unity in Diversity

Enobarbus to Maecenas and Agrippa:

"Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety."

Shakespeare, Antony and Cleopatra

The novels of George Eliot reflect the author's sense of the timelessness of truth. As a Chinese landscape painting creates the illusion of infinite depth by ignoring traditional western principles of perspective, so an Eliot novel allows the reader multiple avenues of interpretation because it refuses to assume the Victorian position of leaving no questions unanswered. In this regard, Eliot's work points toward the twentieth century.

Modern art and architecture assess the importance of open space as equal with that of the object; and, similarly, modern literature balances the stated with the unstated, the explicit with the implied, in order to allow each reader the freedom to experience the text in his own way. In anticipation of these values, George Eliot demonstrated a healthy respect for the unspoken word, the literary void which presses the reader's imaginative powers into service. At bottom, this is a Wordsworthian ideal; and in its fulness, it anticipates the twentieth-century

appreciation for the balance between l'être et le néant. Eliot's novels allow for the interrelativity of the declared and the suggested, a concept which the Chinese--specifically the Taoists--refer to as the complement of yin and yang. In this way, Eliot's fiction anticipates the work of James, Conrad, and Joyce.

J. Hillis Miller suggests that Eliot's novels bring about "intersubjectivity" between author, narrator, characters, and reader (59). This implies the reader's emergence from a possibly subjective state into a recognition of the other as other--Feuerbach's "I-Thou." A significant factor in George Eliot's literary mission was her conscious attempt to improve the human condition by motivating those whom she could influence toward a state of altruism or objectivity. She did this not by formalizing a set of rules or beliefs, but by offering examples of struggling and developing fictional characters who, by their actions and judgments, can impress readers and possibly influence their growth toward concern for others and selflessness. Bernard J. Paris states very simply that through her fiction, George Eliot "sought to enlarge our vision and sympathy" (126).

The multifarious vision of Eliot was a direct result of her openness and sensitivity. From early childhood until her death, she sought to learn whatever she could about everything from Eastern culture to English cooking.

She read and absorbed religious texts, philosophical treatises, historical data, literary works, and political essays and culled from these vast experiences a unique and personalized set of principles upon which she based both her life and her writings. This vision, which was the result of that combined exposure, determined what was good, assimilated it, and prepared to promulgate it to the reading public.

A considerable amount of Eliot's thinking, particularly during her younger years, was influenced--and even formed--by her experience of reading the Romantic poets. She ascribed to much of their philosophy, revered many of their ideals, and incorporated several of their principles into her writings. For example, specifically from William Wordsworth, she learned about the importance of the imagination as a source of man's creativity. Characteristically, Eliot adapted Wordsworth's theory to suit her own beliefs and, as Karen B. Mann notes, established a "new perception of the importance of imagination" (675). Nevertheless, the fact remains that it was William Wordsworth who introduced her to an aesthetic acceptance of the imaginative powers as the source not only of the visual arts and poetry, but also of invention, idealism, and the general amelioration of society. Because of the influence of Wordsworth, Eliot acquired a heightened appreciation for the beauty of nature and a special

fondness for describing it. He taught her the wonder of watching nobility and leadership rise from common peasantry and the drama within the lives of simple, rural people. Finally, Wordsworth taught her his personal variety of pantheism--God existing in the magnificence of nature. This became one of the contributing influences toward her eventual rejection of formal religion.

Although Shelley's influence on Eliot is not so obvious, his belief in the necessity of the dedication of an artist to his art and in the function of the artist/poet as priest--that is, worshiper and clarion--is reflected in the seriousness with which George Eliot accepted her chosen task of writing for the public. This influence is further identified through the words spoken by Daniel Deronda's Herr Klesmer, who describes the task of the true artist and acknowledges the dedication required of one who makes art/poetry the center of his life. In addition to this, the works of George Eliot seem to reflect one particular statement made by Shelley in his "Defence of Poetry." Referring to painting, sculpting, writing, and composing music, Shelley explained that the dynamics of creating flow from and return to society and that because the artist is highly sensitive to what has gone before and what is current, he expresses a vision in his art wherein "the future is contained within the present, as the plant within the seed" (429). In my opinion, if the work of George

Eliot did nothing else, it pointed the way to the future.

But what of George Eliot as a Victorian novelist? It is true that much of Eliot's fiction reflected the times from which it came. She shared the sociopolitical concerns of her peers and interested herself in the rising middle class. She also demonstrated a healthy respect the traditional mid-nineteenth-century work ethic, exemplified in both the person and the story of Adam Bede. Many of her characters live typically Victorian lifestyles. The Poyzers, the Vincys, the Chettams, the Mallingers, and the Dodsons faithfully depict Victorian attitudes and ideals. They preach the value of manual labor, of family loyalty, of church and neighborhood involvement, of traditional roles maintained by the sexes, and of revering the past. All of these beliefs reflect what historians have come to call Victorian ethics.

As far as Eliot's involvement with vocation or calling is concerned, she both paralleled and departed from the Victorian stance. Those who see her as bogged down by Determinism will probably consider her reflective of the times; conversely, those who, like Sartre, see her as representing free will and freedom of choice will list this among her non-Victorian characteristics. It is worth noting that Eliot did display specific non-Victorian attitudes in much--if not most--of her fiction. As I have previously discussed, her position on the role of women in

society differed greatly from that of the writers who insisted on casting a female simply as an attentive, home-bound wife and mother--a woman incapable of understanding, or even caring about, social and political issues. In addition to this, Eliot assumed a singularly avant garde attitude toward both the Jews and toward illegitimacy in Daniel Deronda. Where in Victorian literature does there exist a messianic hero, a truly inspired leader, who is both a bastard and Jew?

As George Eliot progressed in her art, she shed more and more of the conventional trappings of her contemporaries. F. R. Leavis recognizes this departure and the unique accomplishments that grew out of it and refrains from categorizing her as a "Victorian." Rather he graces her with membership in his elitist literary society which he calls the "great tradition." Members can only be those who, in Leavis's opinion, have produced novels of substance and significance, whose style and characterization are fully developed, whose moral and ethical messages are sound, who are concerned for the integrity of art, who can communicate with intensity the sensitivity of the human condition, and whose message is philosophically profound (Ch. 1). Leavis states specifically of George Eliot that

in her maturest work [Eliot] handled with unprecedented subtlety and refinement the personal relations of sophisticated characters . . . and used . . . an original psychological notation corresponding to the fineness of her psychological and moral insight.

In this, Leavis remarks, George Eliot had a profound influence on Henry James, particularly with regard to the "mature perfection of Washington Square" (16).

First of all, this "psychology" to which Leavis refers stands as one of the primary reasons that a true evaluation of George Eliot should begin by acknowledging her spiritual kinship with the twentieth century. Her perceptive and analytic powers greatly exceeded those of her peers. Eliot had a deep awareness of the inner workings of the mind of man. She probed into his motivation, his selectivity, his self-assessment, and his judgment about whatever was external to himself. She dealt with escapism, loneliness, alienation, and the alter ego. Like Conrad, Eliot liked to explore man's darker side and juxtapose it against the light; she even made an awkward attempt at presenting Gwendolen's "stream of consciousness" as Miss Harleth spoke with Grandcourt at the Archery Meet.

Secondly, Eliot's "moral insight" included much which was definitely not Victorian. As Paris reminds us, "Eliot felt that suffering humanizes" ("Religion" 17). The characters in her texts represent a mixture of both the romance and the mysticism of suffering. There are those who suffer until they are saved by others like Caterina Sarti and Janet Dempster; there are those who suffer because their own actions have caused them to experience guilt like Arthur Donnithorne and Gwendolen Harleth; there

are those who suffer the injustices of society like Maggie Tulliver and Hetty Sorrel; there are those who agonize over their own destiny like Daniel Deronda and Dorothea Brooke; there are the Philip Wakems and the Amos Bartons who experience the loss of a loved one and the Adam Bedes who love the wrong people. All of these characters experience suffering, and many of them grow because of it. Some come to tragic ends and others endure a martyrdom which is either physical and bloody or mental and unbloody. However, whatever the circumstances and the outcome of the suffering might be, Eliot's fiction demonstrates that pain is a powerful catalyst to growth, and that the man who suffers is the one who can best assist his suffering brothers.

Thirdly, in accordance with Leavis's designation of fully developed characterization as one of the criteria for belonging to the "great tradition," Elliott B. Gose, Jr., notes that George Eliot placed her "protagonists in a tension of which the need to develop a personal identity [was] only half. The other equally necessary half of the character's identity we might label as archetypal" (134). This dual focus of how primary fictional persons are revealed to the reader necessarily adds dimension to the main characters and allows the public to identify with them imaginatively. Jerome Thale, who wrote some twenty years after Leavis, places Eliot--not simply with Austen, James,

Conrad, and Lawrence within the "great tradition"--but in a class by herself. He writes:

There has scarcely been a more learned writer in English since Milton. George Eliot was accepted as an intellectual equal by men like Herbert Spencer and Frederic Harrison, not because of her novels but for the force of her mind and the breadth of her culture.

(3)

Finally, Barbara Hardy's assessment of Eliot's power of characterization compares it to that of Shakespeare (Novels 4). Certainly Charles Dickens proved that strong characterization was definitely an integral part of the Victorian tradition, but characterization with the dual view--from within and from without--is an element which is more readily identified with the post-Victorian novel.

Eliot's intensity of character is simply reflective of the intensity with which she approached every facet of both her writing and her life. She is one of the few novelists of whom it can be categorically stated that her life could be considered one with her art. The reason for this is the simple fact that we have nine volumes of letters and hundreds of essays and articles authenticated as coming from the mind and the pen of George Eliot. Many of these--either directly or indirectly--refer to, explain, or discuss her novels and her convictions about writing in general, obligations of authorship, her specific purposes in plying her art, and her intended moral messages. Neil Roberts concludes from evidence of this sort that "effective thought about George Eliot's beliefs cannot,

therefore, exist separately from critical thoughts about her art" (222). There is no doubt about it, not only is Eliot's life philosophy expressed in her novels, even her process of discovery is contained within them.

Eliot's fiction examined the old standards with regard to the clergy, organized religion, the role of women, the social position of the Jews, the place of the aristocracy, the validity of idealism, the function of art, and the possible nobility of the common man; and it raised serious questions about accepting attitudes just because they are either fashionable or traditional. George Eliot--the person--found that when standards are examined, they are often found to carry within them some truth and some falsity. George Eliot--the person--discovered that extricating the truth from religious teaching, Romantic writing, Positivistic doctrine, Feuerbachian logic, and scientific argument afforded her a personal philosophy which was her very own and within which there seemed to be no contradictions. I have chosen to refer to this process as her eclecticism, and I use that term in a manner of high praise. George Eliot--the person--with all of her experience and intelligence and with all of her determination and fortitude, independently selected her own beliefs about God, about man, about society, and about interpersonal relationships; and she not only practiced them in her life, but she exposed them in her novels,

despite the vulnerability that doing so created for her.

It would probably have been easy for Eliot to formulate a "Doctrine of Life Principles" according to herself because her incisive and well-developed mind certainly had the capabilities of doing so. However, one of the first principles on her list would have stated that every individual must develop a philosophy for himself. Her novels make this concept obvious: what was right for Adam Bede would never have done for Daniel Deronda; what was a solution for Maggie Tulliver would not have worked for either Dorothea Brooke or Gwendolen Harleth. The novels serve to raise a number of philosophical and moral questions, but these questions were meant to be answered subjectively within the mind and heart of the reader. Eliot's fiction both simply and profoundly offers examples of the choices, mistakes, and sacrifices of fictional beings. Finally, her novels present a rationale which has within it the power to stimulate deeper thought, better judgment and increased involvement with other human beings.

Eliot's fiction takes advantage of the fact that human activity--whether actual or vicarious, whether painful or pleasant--tends to have a ripple effect on all whom it touches. What Tryan did for Janet Dempster is similar to what Deronda did for Gwendolen; except that, in the case of the latter, the situation is more intense. Eliot had grown as a writer during those twenty years. It

is true that she was forever changing, growing, but beneath the variation always lay a constant belief in morality, altruism, equality, and freedom. In the Clerical Scenes as in Daniel Deronda, Eliot's commitment to the necessity for idealism and the importance of man's power to retrieve his fellows from a life of guilt and introspection remained the same. What had changed was her power of expression and her confidence in dealing with the inner workings of the mind.

One of the major sources of George Eliot's power as a novelist was her familiarity with the human psyche. When Dickens and Thackeray were describing external interaction, Eliot was probing the mind and will and dealing with motivation, the agony of decision, guilt, and moral judgment. Eliot, whom Ruby Redinger describes as "tormented by a sense of a large but undefined destiny" (71), created her own essence by discovering how to communicate to the reading public the inner workings of a man's soul. She recognized the fact that man is more than the sum of his actions and anticipated the modern novel with her judicious use of psychological probing.

It is true that George Eliot very likely never heard the word "Existentialism"; but, nevertheless, her writings prefigure the Existentialist novel as it is elaborated by Jean-Paul Sartre. Her characters are free to choose their own destinies; they reflect on the morality of their own actions and accept responsibility for their choices; they

come forth into the adult world in varying stages of consciousness of the needs of others and grow toward contributing to the amelioration of the human condition. In addition to this, Eliot dealt with man's isolation and alienation from his fellows. She demonstrated how a separated individual could only experience reconciliation with his peers when a more objective human being extended concern for the isolated person's growth and adjustment and somehow touched him spiritually, psychologically, morally, and intellectually.

Eliot's eclecticism--her choice of certain principles or what we refer to as Romanticism, Positivism, and Existentialism-- is probably based on the underlying secular humanism which supports each of these movements. However, rather than simply categorizing her generically as a humanist, we do her greater justice by presenting her as one who consciously chose each tenet of her personal life philosophy. Because this statement all but ignores the selectivity which she applied to the literary and artistic achievements of her own time, it is necessary to point out that there were several contemporary influences on the life and works of Eliot aside from the literature and the philosophy previously discussed.

For example, Franz Liszt was an intimate friend of George Henry Lewes and George Eliot. He was an eminent conductor of Wagner's music. When on the continent, the

Leweses often went to hear the works of Wagner conducted by Liszt. Martha S. Vogeler comments that for George Eliot "music was a source of personal delight so intense that it became part of her sacramental view of human experience. From music she drew metaphors for the human sympathy that binds man to man, the living to the dead" (71). Specifically from the music of Wagner, Eliot became familiar with the leitmotif, a principle which she subtly incorporated into her method of characterization.

In her own essay entitled "Liszt, Wagner, and Weimar," Eliot commented on this technique of "using a particular melody or musical phrase as a sort of Ahnung or prognostication of the approach or action of a particular character." Obviously this musical method of characterization was important to her or she would not have been moved to call attention to it in her essay. She further noted that the operas of Wagner demonstrated "organic unity," and she found that their music represented "a gradual unfolding and elaboration of that fundamental contrast of emotions, that collision of forces which is the germ of tragedy" (104). The novels of Eliot do, in a sense, reflect the music of Wagner. They are complex, unified, emotional, tragic, and well-orchestrated. There are certain pastoral passages which serve as the leitmotif for her peasants and other social gatherings which indicate the presence of political leaders.

In addition to the impact which music had on both her life and her writing, aspects of the visual arts--although subtle--can be recognized in her writing. First of all, the chiaroscuro of the Baroque and Romantic painters weaves its way through the more descriptive passages of her fiction. Secondly, the delicate renderings of the Impressionists are reflected in several of her works, particularly in the hazy picture she paints of Daniel Deronda. Thirdly, the influence of the Symbolists, with their working and reworking of images, can be detected in Eliot's use of specific objects which have significant meanings beyond their own.

Eliot's was a time in which the Impressionists and the Realists lived side by side. The Impressionists worked to explain the world according to its essence; the Realists endeavored to demonstrate that same world according to its existence. Happily, it was also the era of the Positivists, who attempted to explain the world according to the way essence and existence interrelate. Positivism must have appealed greatly to George Eliot because it did not preclude the invalidity of either essence or existence; rather, Positivism attempted to reconcile these opposites, as she had done, by identifying them as different perspectives of the same truth.

Eliot recognized that the reconciliation of opposites necessarily brought about change. She identified

that pattern within the historical development of music, sculpture, painting, literature, philosophy, science, and religion. Knoepfmacher tells us that "in her attempts to define men's thought after a truer order, . . . George Eliot created a new form--an epic that is not an epic, a history that is a fiction, a work of prose that can and must be read like a poem" ("Fusing Fact" 68). For Eliot, beneath opposing forces, there was always some common factor.

Throughout her life, Eliot learned from the Romantic poets, the German philosophers, the classical Greek dramatists, the medieval theologians, the French Impressionists, and the Baroque composers that there are numerous ways of evaluating and expressing life--each true and valid in its own way and all containing some degree of merit that made it worthy of serious consideration. Recognizing the basic differences among these historical entities, George Eliot adopted those portions of each of them which appealed to her as fundamentally sound. She incorporated them into the wholly personalized life philosophy that gave direction to both her life and her fiction. Eliot was a thorough and deliberate woman, one who consciously planned and executed everything she wrote. Bonaparte indicates that "we have found nothing yet that Eliot did not deliberately put in her novels; we know that from her letters, her journals, her essays, and above all

from the novels themselves" (viii). Based on this evaluation, George Eliot, like Sartre, was truly a person who was engagé--dedicated to the art of communicating truth about the human condition.

In my opinion, her goal was to expose and to praise all that was good in the nineteenth century, all that was worthwhile in the centuries before, and all that might come to be--based on her personal viewpoint and vision--in the centuries to come. Further, she strove to present a panoply of choices to both her contemporaries and to those who would read her work in future decades, and to tell anyone who would listen that it is good to question the status quo because from serious questions come the answers which improve the human condition. Eliot's purpose had as its reciprocal goals both the vigorous growth of the individual and the steady forward movement of society toward a secular, inter-salvific mode in which this health-giving dynamic might become a dominant positive socio-political force.

Notes

¹This statement about Eliot's altruism should not, by any means, be construed as implying that personal accomplishment was not part of her professional output. As a matter of fact, both in her life and in her fiction, Eliot attempted to demonstrate how both the "impulse toward self-aggrandizing ambition and the impulse toward selfless contribution to society [could] be united in a single life" (Mintz 2).

²Charles Bray, a ribbon manufacturer and free-thinker, believed that determinism was not absolute. He wrote The Education of Feelings, which "advocates the educating of the feelings in children so that they will learn in time to choose to act in behalf of others, rather than out of selfish motives" (Stone 215). According to Bray, "all the faculties were supposed to exist in everyone in different degrees, but could be strengthened by exercise or weakened by neglect. A man's innate character was therefore susceptible to modification" (Wright 36). It was at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Bray that Marian Evans met Mrs. Bray's brother, Charles Hennell. He had "independently reached conclusions similar to those of the German historical critics, undermining all that is miraculous and supernatural in the Gospels. His Inquiry into the Origins of Christianity had reached its second edition when [Marian] bought her copy and inscribed her name on 2 January 1842" (Pinion x). Charles Bray also dabbled in phrenology and took Miss Evans to have her skull read in 1844 (Wright 37).

³According to Gordon Haight, Marian read Bulwer-Lytton's novel, Devereux, when she was thirteen years old. In the text, there is an amiable atheist, an Italian, Bezoni. Marian was very confused and disturbed by the fact that religion (or lack of it) had really nothing to do with moral excellence. This was one of the first experiences in Miss Evans's life which made her question the necessity and value of formal religion. Wordsworth, the lover of nature and proponent of pantheism, was a second major influence on Marian as she moved away from the Evangelical Church.

⁴See notations in the Journal of Robert Evans, Marian's father, dated 2 and 16 January 1842 (Haight, Letters 1: 124). Also for insight into Marian's thinking at the time, see her letter to her father dated 28 February 1842 in which she writes with regard to Jewish and

Christian Scriptures:

I regard these writings as histories consisting of mingled truth and fiction. . . . [I cannot] profess to join in worship which I wholly disapprove. This and this alone I will not do even for your sake--anything else however painful I would cheerfully brave to get you a moment's joy. (Letters 1: 128-29)

⁵I use no page references here because this is a summary of Sartre's lecture and many thoughts are combined from various sections.

⁶A second source which confirms and repeats this data can be found in a letter to Sara Hennell, dated 7 October 1859:

Although I had only heard her spoken of as a strange person, given to a fanatical vehemence of exhortation in private as well as public, I believed that we should find sympathy between us. . . . I remember . . . her telling me one summer afternoon how she had, with another pious woman, visited an unhappy girl in prison, stayed with her all night, and gone with her to execution. . . . Of the girl she knew nothing . . . but that she was a common coarse girl, convicted of child-murder. . . . It then turned out to be the germ of 'Adam Bede.' (Letters 3: 175-76)

⁷For further negative evaluations of Daniel Deronda, see: Henry James, "Daniel Deronda: A Conversation," 167; Alan Mintz, George Eliot & the Novel of Vocation, 162; Graham Martin, "'Daniel Deronda': George Eliot and Political Change," 148; R. T. Jones, George Eliot, 112; Bernard J. Paris, Experiments in Life: George Eliot's Quest for Values, 206-07; Richard Burton, Masters of the English Novel: A Study of Principles and Personalities, 239-40; Harold Bloom, Modern Critical Views: George Eliot, 5.

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The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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